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Victorian Women and the Carnivalesque in Six Novels

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by

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Under the Direction of Leeanne Richardson, PhD

ABSTRACT

This analysis will explore the progression and transformation of carnivalesque theory in six novels. The carnivalesque analysis will focus on Victorian women and the working class over a time period beginning around 1830 and ending in 1910. The novels that comprise this study are Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure;* Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley;* and finally Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End.* The study intends to show a progression in the role of women that utilizes carnivalesque display as a vehicle. Women in the Hardy novels represent those who rebel against prescriptive Victorian mores in the midst of carnivalesque scenes. Hardy intends to use transgressive women and the suffering they endure to illustrate how Victorian rules of decorum and the institution of marriage are confining to point of being destructive. Gaskell and Bronte's novels represent industrial or condition-of-England novels that show how Victorian women gain

greater access and understanding of the working class and poor through spending time with these groups while performing charitable works. The carnivalesque has indeed undergone a partial transformation because scenes that overturn authority occur not only in public settings like the marketplace, but they also show up in the form of worker strikes and uprisings. Because the females in these novels have a greater understanding of the plight of the poor workers, they are able to advocate on their behalf and exert influence upon the managers and owners that helps to bring about reform in the workers' situation. Finally the last two novels represent the culmination of this study as they reveal how carnivalesque scenes, both public and private, frame the experiences of two sets of sisters, both of which occupy the liminal space between the Victorian Age and Modernism. Women have progressed to the point of being able to overcome adversity and personal failure and grow into strong, independent individuals who speak for themselves, live independently, exert their own authority, and finally vote.

INDEX WORDS: carnivalesque, carnival, transgression, hierarchy, female, Victorian

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DEDICATION

I would like to express sincere thanks and love to my husband, Hal Dent for his patience, support, encouragement, and belief in my ability to complete this project. I also want to thank my daughter, Brandi Dent Jones and my son, Tripp Dent for always believing in their mom and for just being wonderful children. Finally, thanks to Barbara Calhoon, who gently pushed me to finish even when I wanted to give up and throw in the towel.

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INTRODUCTION

Long before I ever heard of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, fairs, festivals, costume parties, and rock concerts held a special attraction for me. I loved the sense of freedom that these events carried: the freedom to be someone besides the shy bookworm in the back of my high school classroom, the freedom to dress as outlandishly as I wished, the freedom to speak freely, the freedom to thumb my nose at authority, and the freedom to dance. Of course, this liberation from everyday life was only temporary, and once the event ended, I returned to my quiet corner and my books. Thomas Hardy's novels were among my favorites. I read every one that the school library had: *Desperate Remedies*, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Far from the Madding Crowd*. I loved the doomed romances, the fatalistic tone, and the tragic endings. I was reading for pleasure, not for analysis, so I thought nothing about issues of women, the poor working class, or the Imminent Will. However, I loved the scenes that included fairs, mummeries, skimmity rides, and dancing because they portrayed freedom, joy, and power.

Fast forward to graduate school where my interest in Hardy continued to thrive. I belonged to an online Hardy reading group, and we were discussing fairs in Hardy's novels. Someone mentioned Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and carnivalesque theory. That is the moment when I knew what I wanted to research. By then I had read many other Victorian novels by the likes of Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes, Gaskell, Eliot, and of course, Hardy. I started looking for depictions of fairs or other events during which women and the working class were able to express themselves freely and temporarily overturn the authority of males in charge. I noticed that these acts of transgression did not have to occur at fairs; often this topsy-turvy dynamic occurred in the marketplace, the workplace, and even in the private Victorian home.

Therefore, I expanded notions of the carnivalesque to include other spaces. I looked primarily to Bakhtin's theory, then to Stallybrass and White and Friedrich Nietzsche, and followed with Terry Castle, Ruth Firor, Robert W. Malcolmson, Elizabeth Langland, Constance Harsh, Rosemarie Morgan, and many others who wrote about not only the carnivalesque, but about transgressive women, the British labor movement, Victorian women, Victorian entertainment, the new woman, and movements of reform.

I began to connect depictions of the carnivalesque in certain novels with social issues of the day, specifically those of women, the working class, and the poor. I noticed that because Victorian women often shared the same physical space with the lower classes through shopping in the marketplace, doing church work, or visiting the homes of the poor for charitable purposes, these women had access to and insight into the lives of impoverished workers. The knowledge of Victorian women regarding the lives of the downtrodden far surpassed that of men in positions of authority. I also noticed an unspoken alliance between women and the poor that grew out of the shared marginal experience of otherness. In many novels middle class women began to communicate on behalf of the poor workers and to exert influence upon the male managers and owners. Specifically novels of Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell deal with industrial England and portray female protagonists who not only communicate with the poor workers, but also speak out in their defense, thus raising awareness of the plight of the workers and helping to bring about change in the owners' attitudes. Generally, carnivalesque scenes frame these narratives and act as vehicles of positive developments for workers.

Hardy's novels, however, present more scenes of traditional carnivalesque events. Through mummeries, hiring fairs, gypsying dances, Guy Fawkes' Day bonfires, and skimmity rides, Hardy's characters of the lower realm, both male and female, turn the world upside down

and seize power from those in charge whenever the opportunity arises. However, Hardy's female characters often use these opportunities to cross boundaries of feminine decorum and misbehave. Hardy's women suffer for their misdeeds, but through their suffering, Hardy emphasizes the harsh constraints that the institution of marriage and other Victorian mores hold upon people, especially women. These prescriptive rules of behavior bind individuals so tightly that they cannot help but come to tragic ends. The outcomes for Hardy's protagonists are often excruciatingly painful and unforgettably cruel, but the reader comes away from the novels with a new awareness of the need for change, and once again, carnivalesque performances frame the narratives.

Since Hardy's novels represent an earlier time period and more rural setting, and those of Gaskell and Bronte depict the industrial period, I decided to look at novels that could be deemed late-Victorian or turn-of-the-century books. I chose Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End.* Both novels deal with situations that include owners and the working class, and more importantly they both center around the lives of women, two sets of sisters. *The Old Wives' Tale* includes more traditional carnivalesque scenes while *Howards End* represents the carnivalesque in transformation. The notion of transformation makes sense because carnivalesque theory suggests renewal and metamorphosis, so noting how the theory itself has changed seems apropos. The females in these novels reside in a time of transformation in the world of commerce, in geographical space, in the institution of marriage, in rules of decorum, in technology, and in possibilities for women. There is a merging of the old and new in both of these stories that emphasizes looking forward to growth and a looking back to the old ways. The novels carry a fluidity that suggests constant movement, and once again, the carnivalesque is the vehicle. Public displays are certainly present in the form of exotic animals,

weddings, hot-air balloon rides, street mobs, public executions, and new ways of advertising. There are also private moments of overturning hierarchy portrayed in private thoughts, domestic scenes, speeding automobiles, and theft. Bennett and Forster's women face isolation and abandonment, but do not crumble under the strain. Instead, they survive quite well and profitably. They rise to the top, showing that the hierarchy of authority is undergoing change, and suggesting that more change is yet to come.

In sum, this study looks at six different novels in sets of two: two Hardy novels, *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*; two industrial novels, Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South;* and finally Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. The purpose of the analysis is to examine carnivalesque elements juxtaposed with movements toward social reform and change, while noting that each set of novels represents a progression that begins around 1830 and culminates in 1910. The progression revolves around the lives of the working class and women. However, carnivalesque scenes frame the entire study, and women represent the victims, the viewers, the voice, and the vision.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Overview of the Carnivalesque

The Victorian Age defined itself through its unrelenting refusal to accept stasis. Victorian England was a country on the move, laying thousands of miles of railroad track, urbanizing cities around factories that changed a once agrarian country to an industrial powerhouse, building a powerful military force to protect and dominate in forays of expansion, and colonizing around the world to multiply its already abundant resources. Science, industry, progress, and geographic expansion prevailed as England led the rest of the world toward the twentieth century. However, such growth does not occur without consequences, which to a significant degree, emerged as worker unrest, instigating movements toward labor reform. The Chartist Movement was one such reaction, and Richard Altick describes it as the "first sustained, inclusive working-class movement in modern English history" (89). Not only did England grapple with worker unrest, but additionally, on the heels of the French Revolution arose a fear within England, an overarching fear of the mob mentality that would lead to a similar revolt in England. Therefore, large gatherings of people for most any cause evoked anxiety in the country's leaders and a strong desire to rein in such gatherings.

Women, like workers in the Victorian Age, occupied a subordinate position in England's social hierarchy, and labor unrest forged a path for women to begin voicing their own dissatisfaction with the country's inequitable and exploitative treatment of people outside the wealthy and bourgeois realm. Victorian middle class women, through participation in charitable works and church duties, often gained insight into the suffering of the impoverished working class. In an 1861 issue of *Macmillan's Magazine*, Frances Power Cobbe describes the particular connection between Victorian women who engaged in public work and those to whom they offered aid:

> Men may do what must be done on a large scale; but, the instant the work becomes individual and personal, the instant it requires tact and feeling, from that instant it passes into the hands of women. It is essentially their province, in which may be exercised all their moral powers, and all their intellectual faculties. It will give them their full share in the vast operations the world is yet to see. (qtd. in Hollis 235)

These duties that Victorian society defined as the domain of middle-class women placed them in close proximity to the lower realm of society, thus giving them a unique type of perspective and affinity. Rosemarie Bodenheimer posits that "[t]he focus on womanhood is a powerful way to locate space for alternative activity and social criticism in the midst of the social order itself" (qtd. in Harsh 19). Victorian novelists repeatedly explore this patently feminine vantage point, thus lending credence to the possibility of middle class women asserting significant influence regarding social issues of the day.

This analysis focuses on four Victorian novels and two turn-of-the-century novels featuring female protagonists who find the social constraints under which they and the working class live unacceptable. Hence, they begin to express their discontent in various ways in order to draw attention to society's intolerable constraints. Because both middle-class women and workers share a subordinate status to empowered and wealthy males, they often form an unlikely alliance in order to overturn the patriarchal authority of the time period. Middle and even upper-class women commit acts that transgress the boundaries separating the high from the low.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque offers a useful and provocative means of exploring situations, settings, and ways in which the lower realm can overturn the social hierarchy. In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin explains his view of the term he coins

carnivalesque. Early expressions of discontent manifested themselves as performative in nature, generally found in the lower class, and perhaps best expressed as "acting out" or behaving in an unconventional manner. Such performances might occur in carnival settings like fairs, masquerades, mummeries, dances, or other types of festivities. Bakhtin divides these events into three distinct forms:

1. *Ritual spectacles*: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace
2. *Comic verbal compositions*: parodies both oral and written
3. *Various genres of billingsgate*: curses, oaths, popular blazons (5)

Bakhtin specifically states that a key element of the carnivalesque is "[t]he suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time. . . . Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (10). Often subversive actions fall under the auspices of carnival behavior because of the presence of an audience to witness the action, and because the action inverts hierarchy; that is, the control of the situation shifts the focus and control of the moment to the lower order. The higher order wishes to maintain the hierarchy, and the lower order cannot resist challenging it. Bakhtin argues that this overturning of hierarchy, however brief, plants seeds of renewal and metamorphosis: "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal" (10). While this analysis is not limited to carnival events only, it shows that similar inversions can and do occur in a variety of situations. Bakhtin also refers to the "carnival spirit" through which "[p]eople were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations" (10). It is this spirit of carnival that broadens the theory to encompass other spaces of human interaction.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression* expands Bakhtin's theory to include much more than a folkloric approach: "the main importance of [Bakhtin's] study is its broad development of the 'carnivalesque' into a potent, populist, critical inversion of *all* official words and hierarchies in a way that has implications far beyond the specific realm of Rabelais studies" (7). One begins to imagine misconduct outside of the public realm that topples former positions of power. The high finds itself on unfamiliar ground, unbalanced, and at a loss, albeit temporarily, and struggling mightily to re-establish the social order: "Carnival is presented by Bakhtin as a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled" (Stallybrass & White 8). This inverted dynamic between the two poles of the social order creates a space in which the two must meet head-on prior to regaining the hierarchy that existed before the transgression. Certainly this space does not always have to be a public arena to be classified as carnivalesque, a notion which invites analysis of conduct that indeed overturns hierarchy but does not have to present itself as a public spectacle.

The overturning of social and political hierarchy through performative acts finds its origins in the ancient Greek festivals of Dionysus in which a frenzied release of inhibitions becomes part and parcel of a setting in which "[n]ow the slave is a free man, now all the rigid and hostile boundaries that distress, despotism or 'impudent fashion' have erected between man and man break down" (Nietzsche BT 17). As Friedrich Nietzsche describes the abandonment and sense of personal freedom that the Dionysian evokes, one can see the definitive link between the Dionysian and the carnivalesque:

> [H]e feels like a god, he himself now walks about enraptured and elated as he saw the gods walk in dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art:

> the artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysm of intoxication. (Nietzsche BT 18)

The intoxicated state to which the combined ingredients of performance and mass spectatorship give rise increases confidence in the participants and allows them to express their desires without the boundaries of everyday life. Barbara Ehrenreich in *Dancing in the Streets – A History of Collective Joy* asserts a similar freedom for women:

> The most notorious feminine form of Dionysian worship, the *oreibaia,* or winter dance, looks to modern eyes like a crude pantomime of feminist revolt. In mythical accounts, women "called" by the god to participate drop their spinning and abandon their children to run outdoors and into the mountains, where they dress in fawn skins and engage in a 'frenzied dance.' (Ehrenreich 34)

Freedom from traditional roles, albeit temporary, allows the participants to experience what their world would be like without society's constraints. In Ehrenreich's example, the attraction toward that freedom is irresistible like being called by a "god." Upon returning home from their "frenzied dance" in the mountains and resuming traditional activities, the drive to overturn conventional roles remains firmly implanted.

Like Stallybrass and White, Ehrenreich suggests alternate settings for topsy-turvy phenomena to occur. The carnivalesque can take place not only in the public sphere but also within the confines of the Victorian home, in the workplace, in a factory, a merchant's shop, an educational institution, a farmer's field, or even a church. In other words effecting a world-upside-down does not require a large audience. If only one person of power witnesses behavior that destabilizes one's authority, then that behavior creates a topsy-turvy scene. A compelling example cited in this analysis shows Sue Bridehead jumping out of a window to avoid intimacy

with Phillotson. His dominion over her as her husband suffers a downfall. He is the only audience to her behavior, but her misdeed effectively overturns not only his authority, but also transgresses Victorian rules regarding marriage, at least for that moment. Clearly any locus can function as a showplace in which the lower order gains control through performance or rebellious actions, thus overturning the hierarchy long enough to show those in charge the need for change and foreshadowing the inevitability of reform.

A principal point to consider for the purpose of this research lies in the freedom of expression that the carnivalesque allows for those, specifically workers and women, who generally find themselves confined by the boundaries that Victorian society constructs and maintains. Middle-class women often spend time in working class homes when ministering to the needs of the poor. Proximity and communication provide them with insight into the underlying motivations of working class behavior. Society's mores prescribe that a woman's duty is to nurture and minister to those in need. However, female empathy with the lower orders also stems from her own experience with repression. Guy Debord describes a "unity of misery" (63) whereby that which should be opposition, in actuality is a codependent relationship in which "different forms of the same alienation confront each other," and "the spectacle is nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil center of misery" (63). This shared understanding of repression lays the foundation for women and workers to develop behaviors that overturn the social order so that those who witness their subversive acts begin to imagine, if not accept, the need for change.

According to Bakhtin's definition, the carnivalesque represents a freer time when the demands of daily life are loosened, allowing greater freedom of expression:

> . . . it expresses the people's hope of a happier future of a more just social and economic order, of a new truth. The gay aspect of the feast presented this happier future of a general material affluence, equality, and freedom. . . . [t]he marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal. (Bakhtin BT 80)

This hope for a "happier future" and for "change and renewal" compels many women of the Victorian Age to utilize the carnivalesque to instigate and advocate with greater force, to reform previously held notions regarding the nature of society's hierarchical structure.

In *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy characterizes those who find life within the prescribed roles of Victorian society unfulfilling and ultimately unbearable. While many of Hardy's women possess restless spirits and inquisitive minds, they often cannot articulate what in their lives needs to change. In other words, these females have not reached the point that they can openly express their desires for more rights and privileges, but the reader of Hardy's novels derives a clear sense that British society is on the threshold of change: "Hardy's characters in general, and his women characters in particular, each constitute a specific, but isolated, point of resistance to the discursive constitution of femininity. In historical terms their resistance is symptomatic of the emergent feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century" (Thomas 15). Instead of publicly voicing their dissatisfaction, these women, for reasons as individual as the women themselves, transgress lines of convention through wayward acts and place themselves in situations where notions of Victorian propriety possess a tenuous hold, if any at all.

Hardy quite often utilizes the carnivalesque as a venue to disclose female desire for self-definition in a world that can only abide the female persona as developed from models based in men's desires. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene complains that discourse itself prohibits female expression: "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (253). However, Hardy creates intelligent and articulate female characters who voice their desires and aspire to control their destinies. Two of Hardy's most blatant examples of females who transgress conventional boundaries and attempt to establish selfhood are Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* and Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. These characters who often enjoy the freedom of expression that spectacle allows eventually pay a harsh price for their non-conformity, but each first seizes the opportunity to inhabit the role she would like to have in society, a role she believes she deserves. Hardy uses carnivalesque activities or rituals to allow women to acquire freedoms that would normally be inaccessible to them.

Middle class women also serve as vehicles for social change through the carnivalesque as exemplified in Gaskell's *North and South* and Bronte's *Shirley*. Through the act of observation, middle class women of the Victorian age learn much about what motivates the behaviors of others, specifically individuals of the working class. Close proximity, keen observation skills, and empathy are necessary to understand working class problems, and often middle class women have access to those who have the power to effect transformation.

The marginal status that females share with the working class allows them a greater ability to operate on both sides of the line between the upper and lower realm of society. Contrary to the empathy that observation evokes in females, observation by Victorian men in positions of authority happens with a work-related purpose in mind. Male observation functions

as a method of managing and controlling those in their charge. Victorian bourgeois men believe that working class people who transgress boundaries of hierarchy should be uncompromisingly reminded of their place. For example, in Bronte's *Shirley*, Robert Moore firmly admonishes Mr. Barraclough for interfering in the business of his mill: "As to being dictated to by you, or any Jack, Jem, or Jonathan on earth, I shall not suffer it for a moment" (131). Clearly, he fails to heed the advice Caroline gave him earlier: ". . . you must not be proud to your workpeople; you must not neglect chances of soothing them, and you must not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request as austerely as if it were a command" (90). Caroline knows nothing about millwork outside of that which she has observed, but her observations have taught her much about human nature.

As Bronte's *Shirley* portrays, Victorian England saw much unrest among the working class, not only because of low wages and poor working conditions, but also due to the displacement of workers by mechanization:

> Charlotte Bronte carefully fashioned the central dramatic incident of the novel, the attack on Robert Moore's mill, on a real event which took place on 11th April 1812. Owing to a variety of factors, both cultural and environmental, the Spen Valley of Yorkshire (*Shirley's* setting) surprisingly entered the nineteenth century as an early-stage proto-industrial culture, giving local artisans the mistaken belief that they might delay or perhaps avoid the proletariatizing process that was almost complete in towns like nearby Halifax. Buried deep in Charlotte Bronte's novel is this failed eleventh-hour confrontation with technological modernity. (Hiltner 149)

The communication gap between the factory owner and the workers results from a fundamental difference in perspective between the owners and the workers. The owners see the possibility of increased revenue that mechanization represents and demand respect for their authoritarian decisions. The workers see the machines as a threat to the survival of their families and demand understanding from the owners. When the workers began to express their discontent publicly, the factory owners respond in the way that past practice prescribed. Such displays as public gatherings and worker rebellions should be met with organized attempts to control and disband such groups. Repression served as their only solution as British lawmakers had already ordained:

> [I]n 1817, a new law was passed forbidding political demonstrations within one mile of a sitting parliament. . . . When Chartism began to gather momentum in the late 1830s, its remarkable torchlight meetings were also banned. The government argument for direct repression was to claim that such gatherings were inherently seditious, inflammatory and violent. (Haywood 23)

Often worker uprisings take on a carnivalesque quality because they require an audience, and they overturn the hierarchical structure as the workers temporarily take control of the platform.

Female characters in Victorian novels do not observe the behavior of the workers to police and prohibit; instead, because of their good and charitable works, they actually get to know the people. Hence, observation becomes the vehicle for understanding and empathy to happen. Through their observation of the working class families' home lives and their additional witnessing of the carnivalesque spectacle of worker rebellion, they become able to envision solutions that the factory bosses are unable to conceive. One might say that these women acquire the ability to mediate because of the position in society created by their femaleness and undeniably their own wealth, as exemplified in *North and South* and *Shirley*. In a comparison of

the two novels, Nancy Henry underscores the powerful influence of Margaret Hale and Shirley Keeldar:

> Both novels represent the hope of reconciliation between industrial capitalists and workers through the conversion of the capitalist. Both emphasize the influence of women in bringing about this reform. But the women's power goes beyond influence; both Shirley Keeldar and Margaret Hale inherit property and capital, becoming investors in new businesses (and new businessmen) as well as in social reform. (157)

The level of influence that Gaskell and Bronte's women are able to exert attests to the notion that women can participate in carnivalesque scenes and use those scenes to raise awareness for the need for social reform. Additionally, they can do so without undergoing the crushing punishment as experienced by Hardy's Eustacia and Sue.

As England entered the turn of the century, acceptable pastimes and decorum of middle to upper class women experienced a period of transition as illustrated in Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and Forster's *Howards End*. Therefore, portrayals of the carnivalesque, spectacle, and observation, also appear in somewhat different presentations. Both novels confront the problems of class difference and of gender issues pertinent to the time period. However, female protagonists articulate their dissatisfaction quite frankly and prove much more assertive in taking control of their situation, thus showing the advances that have come about since the days of Hardy's female characters. For example, in *The Old Wives' Tale* carnivalesque elements act as signals of change in commerce in provincial England, in marriage for a young woman in France, and most specifically in the level of independence that women may be able to achieve in life. Forster's *Howards End* represents financially secure, upper class women who enjoy discussing

issues of social reform and view themselves as progressive thinkers. However, incorporating change into their lives is quite a different matter because the Victorian mores have not completely disappeared, and the line between the old and new ideologies often becomes indistinct.

The carnivalesque also undergoes a transformation in Forster's novel as the identities of low and high become somewhat unclear. Events such as mummeries, fairs, and marketplace transgressions have virtually disappeared. In fact, shopping occurs indoors in tidy, organized shops as portrayed in Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel's Christmas shopping expedition. They take the train and navigate through the city unescorted and unscathed. Clearly, class hierarchy still matters, but notions of decorum have changed. Additionally, signifiers of modernism like the automobile become aligned with upper class males. Financially independent, upper class women possess significant freedom of self-expression, yet they struggle with the intricacies of relationships with wealthy businessmen and the struggling working class. Michael Levenson sheds light on how the Schlegel sisters attempt to negotiate this middle ground:

> . . . the Schlegels exemplify the predicament of the intellectual situated between the victims and beneficiaries of modern capitalism. Their role is to reach downward toward a depressed clerical class, as represented by Leonard Bast, and upwards towards a thriving business class, as represented by the Wilcoxes. When Helen bears a child fathered by Leonard and when Margaret marries Henry, the Schlegels symbolically fulfill their historical mission, and at the end of the novel when Henry, Margaret, Helen, and Helen's son settle at Howards End ("the symbol for England"), the reconciliation among classes has been achieved. (298)

Levenson's analysis suggests that a lasting overturning of hierarchy has been achieved in the end. Scenes of inversion leading up to this point have mostly transformed with time's passage. Helen's son does represent a form of class reconciliation, but his illegitimacy is softened by his family's wealth and power. If one looks to the future, the world-upside-down in Forster's novel does not meliorate issues of class and gender completely. Therefore, the overturning of society's rules regarding class and gender are indeed temporary as befits Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory.

Surely, the world of early twentieth century England is more topsy-turvy than ever as the novels end with women in power, and with two of its once most haughty men incapacitated, one weakened by age, and the other imprisoned. Additionally, an illegitimate child arises as a symbol of hope for changes to come in the twentieth century. Through the six novels that comprise this analysis, one can see a process unfold over the course of the Victorian period, a process driven by women who not only feel the pangs of their own marginality, but also bear witness to the plight of the working class, and through the understanding of a shared experience, move Great Britain toward change.

Chapter 2–

Feminine Expression of Unrest through the Carnivalesque and Transgressive Domestic Acts: Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*

In *Rabelais and His World* Mikhail Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as a public and authoritatively approved locus of celebration that allows participants of the lower stratum of society to assume roles of authority, thereby inverting the hierarchical structure of society for the period of time during which the celebration occurs. Thomas Hardy includes this Bakhtinian form of the carnivalesque in many of his novels to show the significant role of carnival events in the lives of his characters, and by doing so, he shows the inversion that happens when people can escape the everyday boundaries that define how they should behave based on their position in the social hierarchy. Hardy's world includes mummeries, skimmity rides, hiring fairs, hang fairs, trade fairs, and effigies, and he portrays them in all of their topsy-turvy glory. However, he also creates a domestic carnivalesque that, publicly, through his discourse, but privately, in the world of the novel, overturns the strongly held conventions of his readers by allowing them to see what happens when the lower realm overturns their prescribed roles. This chapter will show how Hardy utilizes the public and private carnivalesque in order to allow his female characters to express their dissatisfaction with societal constraints under the short-term sanction that inversion of hierarchy provides. Participants gain temporary freedom by creating a setting in which conventional roles are relaxed.

The fact that Hardy repeatedly depicts his characters' rebellion against social mores supports the notion that he possesses a keen awareness of the need to bring Victorian societal and cultural boundaries under scrutiny. Hardy not only utilizes the Bakhtinian public carnivalesque, celebrations that enable the lower realm of society to temporarily overturn the social hierarchy.

He also develops a modified, domestic form in many of his novels since the space of the novel has similar qualities of being both public and private. People tend to read the novel individually in their own homes, but Hardy, who also writes in a private setting, does so as his profession and sends this private writing out into the public sphere. Similarly, the novels show that these domestic actions have a wider significance in the public arena. Because the demands of verisimilitude very often prohibit showing women in outright transgression during the time of Hardy's writing, he includes this domestic version of carnival-like behavior. In these private interior settings Hardy shows how women often misbehave in the privacy of their own homes and even in their very thoughts. This modified form of the carnivalesque becomes public when the reader sees how Hardy the author reveals his own contemplation of the social constraints of his day, especially those regarding women. In *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature*, Anne Z. Mickelson describes Hardy as "very much aware of the need to redefine the basis for family, sexual, and marriage relationships" (2). She further emphasizes his sense of "the necessity of a closer look at the role of women in society" (2). The carnivalesque presents an opportunity for Hardy to examine how these social constructs run counter to humanity's natural inclinations: "In men and women, nature becomes the unconscious and the instinctual part which lies beneath the outer surface and is frequently in opposition to society and culture with its rigid man-made laws, taboos and restrictions" (Mickelson 29). When rules regarding decorum relax, as they will in such a topsy-turvy atmosphere, people will drop their inhibitions and temporarily forget the shackles of society's restrictions.

In Hardy's world middle class women often seize autonomy wherever it presents itself in order to experience life outside the strict boundaries of decorum. Acts contradicting the Victorian image of submissive, innocent, "angel in the house" color Hardy's women in ways that most

assuredly align with the carnivalesque. The participants, whether a character or characters within the novel or Hardy's reading audience, see the possibilities that a world-upside-down offers. By taking away these possibilities, Hardy emphasizes the troublesome nature of limitations that force women to place themselves in socially perilous positions in order to express their heart's desire. Admittedly, acts of transgression do not always manifest themselves as public displays as illustrated in Jude and Sue's public display of affection at the fair. Sometimes characters exhibit a private transgression such as a young bride jumping out the window to avoid having sex with her husband. I will call such types of private acts the domestic carnivalesque. An important difference between the domestic carnivalesque and the standard Bakhtinian version is that the domestic form is restricted to women, whereas the standard form includes all disempowered individuals. Hardy's novel itself represents a public arena in which he illustrates rituals of reversal through which the traditionally lower order, in this case women, moves to the forefront and takes empowerment wherever they can.

These very acts invert the patriarchal structure of power, hence temporarily placing control in the hands of the socially downtrodden: "…. one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). Hardy often portrays these times of "temporary liberation" as moments when women express their unrest and dissatisfaction with the restrictive roles that their world thrusts upon them. Hardy presents his female protagonists as sentient, intelligent beings who are not only marginalized socially, but they are tragically outside of their time because they allow themselves to think about life in a freer world than the one they occupy.

Ultimately, they experience horrendous suffering for both their private and public rebelliousness because Hardy, in order to be realistic, must abide by his time's constraints:

> Hardy presents the same kinds of objects at once unjustly and sentimentally. And this is the manifestation in the "verbal correlative" of Hardy's attitude of the contradiction inherent in that attitude. Because he sees only a single reality, that of the time-bound actual world, the life of that reality has to be at once incurably evil and potentially good. (Mizener 201)

Despite the later suffering, Hardy is able to represent the positive possibilities of a life free from Victorian England's harsh boundaries. One example occurs in *Jude the Obscure* at an agricultural fair. The readers see Jude and Sue having achieved true happiness in their unconventional, unmarried state, but their historical time period, symbolically embodied in Father Time, cannot allow such transgression to continue. Hardy has Father Time kill all of the couple's children and himself, and "[t]he effect of this incident on Jude and Sue is to place each of them in the position from which the other had started at the beginning of the book" (Mizener (205). Hardy gives his audience a vision of the possibility that overturning convention offers, then cruelly snatches them back to the punitive reality of their time period.

Hardy's employment of the carnivalesque, both Bakhtinian and domestic, derives from an artistic effort to open the eyes of Victorian society to the faultiness of a system that is unsatisfactory, unjust, and ultimately destructive. This chapter will explore these forms of the carnivalesque in *The Return of the Native*, set in the 1840's (Boumelha 49) and *Jude the Obscure*, apparently set in the 1850's to 1860's, based on Arabella Donn's emigration to Australia and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Hardy set these novels thirty to fifty years prior to their publication dates in order to emphasize the subordinate positions of women and the

working class to middle and upper class men. He makes the artistic choice to have the time periods of the novels preclude the second reform bill, major labor and educational reforms, and especially, any significant public awareness of the plight of women. Certainly Hardy's concern with society's inequities occupies a premier position in his oeuvre:

> Hardy may not focus specifically on the woman's role in the family, but he does take sensation fiction's widened scope and use it to explore the conflicts and ambiguities that confront women attempting to negotiate autonomy in an aggressively patriarchal society. His obvious (if occasionally compromised) sympathy with that struggle often lies at the center of his creative impulse, and his perception that the resulting forced accommodations are deeply ambivalent, and at times deadly, can move his combination of melodrama and sensationalism into a tragic mode that expands the form even further. (Nemesvari 12).

Indeed many of Hardy's women do cross over hierarchical boundaries, but they generally pay for their misdeeds with tremendous loss and suffering. These tragic outcomes emphasize the shortcomings of a society that confines women to such prescriptive roles.

In *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure* Hardy portrays two female characters, Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead, who find the life of a middle class Victorian woman unfulfilling and ultimately unbearable. The class differentiation is important because lower class women like Susan Nunsuch and Arabella Donn ironically possess more freedom than their "betters" and survive. Hardy arms Eustacia and Sue with restless spirits, inquisitive minds, and a poignant understanding that they are not the women their world expects them to be. They break society's rules, and their disobedience carries substantial perils to reputation, status, relationships, and survival.

In *The Return of the Native* Hardy presents the Bakhtinian carnivalesque by portraying festivities that allow for alternate roles and behaviors, one example being the Christmas mummery in which Eustacia participates. In *Jude the Obscure* Sue Bridehead's carnivalesque acts occur predominantly in the private or domestic form, but are no less effective in their undermining of social hierarchy. Eustacia and Sue each represent women of the middle class who are aware of and subject to societal boundaries; however, each takes advantage of the opportunity to express the role she would like to have in life. Society views these roles as unacceptable, but the temptation to perform these roles proves irresistible for these women. Hardy astutely depicts Eustacia and Sue in ways that draw empathy from his readers, yet he leaves no doubt that women in the Victorian age suffer cruel outcomes for their non-conformity:

> For Jude and Sue especially there is simply no place for them to enact the individuality they wish to construct, in Jude's case because it can only be achieved through a class mobility that is still fiercely resisted, and in Sue's because it can only be achieved through a sexual autonomy that is equally reprobated. (Nemesvari 182)

Indeed there exists no place that will accept Sue and Eustacia's individual beliefs, but they each exhibit their distinctiveness through both public and private acts of rebellion when the opportunity arises.

Eustacia possesses a passionate and spirited nature that refuses to conform; indeed, it appears that she cannot conform. She rails at the dearth of options that Egdon Heath has to offer her and spins fantasies of a freer life. Boumelha describes *The Return of the Native* as "much concerned with frustration, with ill-matched couples, incoherent aspiration, and a restless dissatisfaction with the material conditions of life as it presents itself on Egdon [Heath]" (51).

The stalemate that Eustacia's life has reached leaves her with a near unbearable melancholy:

> To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught it vapours. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine. (*RN* 73)

Eustacia cannot make peace with her environment, and she believes that the only cure for her situation lies in escaping the confines of Egdon Heath. The rules that govern behavior for a young woman in rural Victorian England are suffocating to her, and ease for her frustrated spirit can only be gained in a place like Paris, a progressive environment that she believes holds freedom for a woman like her. Such freedom does not exist in the rural landscape that appears wide open, but in truth remains bound by the strict rules of a close knit community overseen by longstanding tradition embodied in the area's matriarch, Mrs. Yeobright and her niece, Thomasin. Eustacia rebels against such convention in her thoughts and in her secret assignations with Damon Wildeve; therefore, her isolation provides some advantages. However, she knows that the populace of the heath would never abide a public display of her discontent. Therefore, she must capitalize on any opportunity to manipulate her circumstances in order to accomplish her goal.

Eustacia relies upon mystery and spectacle to exert her superior position in the social hierarchy of Egdon Heath. The fires set by the furze cutters, supposedly in honor of the Gunpowder Plot but in reality "the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies" (*RN*14) provide her not only with the opportunity to create a spectacle but also

serve as a signal for her to summon her lover, Wildeve. Ruth Firor explains the rebellious significance of Eustacia's isolated fire and foretells her ultimate punishment for her display:

> The fires on Egdon Heath were not need-fires, not an act of orgiastic worship, but a timid act of rebellion. Beneath the rude revelry of the Egdon folk lay a half-acknowledged fear; but once a year they took this liberty with their ancient enemy. Egdon accepted their sole gesture of defiance with easy indifference, but upon Eustacia Vye it poured the vials of its wrath. Here was an enemy who had built herself a solitary fire, and from it viewed in cold disdain all the terrors of the heath. Egdon's revenge is quiet and terrible; in a year and a day it has its will with Eustacia. (150)

The lighting of her own more spectacular fire highlights Eustacia's radical nature, showing her difference from the mass of humanity, thus emphasizing Hardy's intentional portrayal of the depth of her rebellion. Whereas the poor men with meager fires are merely following tradition, Eustacia reaches back to grasp the historical empowerment inherent to Guy Fawkes' Day and even further back to the power of pagan rituals:

> Ostensibly, the occasion is the annual celebration (still observed today) of the deliverance of England from the Gunpowder Plot. This was a scheme to blow up the English houses of Parliament on Nov. 5, 1605. One of the members of Parliament was warned by a relative not to attend Parliament that day and the plan was exposed. Guy Fawkes, a leading conspirator, was arrested, and is still burned in effigy on November 5 at bonfires all over the country. In reality the dance originated in antiquity. As Hardy's biographer J. I. M. Stewart explains, "when the rustics of Egdon dance round their blaze on Rainbarrow they are doing as their

> remotest ancestors did as the days shortened and the iron reign of the *Winterkönig* began." (Wright)

As the heath men's fires begin to diminish, Eustacia's bonfire continues to thrive:

> Save one; and this was the nearest of any, the moon of the whole shining throng. It lay in a direction precisely opposite to that of the little window in the vale below. Its nearness was such that, notwithstanding it actual smallness, its glow infinitely transcended theirs. (*RN* 25)

Susan Nunsuch comments on Eustacia's air of mystery when the men realize that this particular fire is of her construction and not that of her grandfather: "She is very strange in her ways, living up there by herself, and such things please her" (*RN* 25). Many of the heath dwellers believe Eustacia to be a witch, but Susan, representative of the poor class and herself a practicing witch, fears the power she sees in Eustacia and later exerts her own empowerment ritual to bring Eustacia down.

Hardy's chapter titled "Queen of Night" features the powerful spectacle of Eustacia and provides insight into her ability to overturn the patriarchal hierarchy as she manipulates and weakens the men around her. Mystery surrounds her, and even her physical appearance gives her an otherworldly dominance over her observers: "Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (*RN* 58). Rosemarie Morgan discusses the gulf that separates the model woman from the model goddess:

> Hardy is careful to make the distinction by negation, between model goddess and model woman: the model woman (represented here by Thomasin) exhibits submissiveness not imperiousness, docility not fervour, amiability not anger,

> demureness not passion. The model goddess clearly belongs to a different world. (62)

Indeed Eustacia lacks resemblance to the conventional Victorian woman who acquiesces to the rules of decorum and fears the judgmental gaze of others. Thomasin's character stands in complete opposition to that of Eustacia as Thomasin fears society's unforgiving judgment after her failed elopement with Wildeve suggests that she has come to ruin: "I am a warning to others, just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are. What a class to belong to" (*RN* 100). Her shame makes her physically ill and causes her to hide from society until marriage with Wildeve restores her position as a good woman. Morgan explains the contrast between the two women: "Where Thomasin enacts the exemplary, dutiful, submissive, forbearing wife, Eustacia burns with 'smouldering rebelliousness'" (Morgan 59). Thomasin shuns sexual transgression while Eustacia lives "to be loved to madness" (*RN* 61). It is not always people who limit Eustacia's power; it is often setting: "Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biased her development. Egdon was her Hades," (*RN* 61). Yet she feels determined to exercise freedom whenever she can, and the topsy-turvy world of celebratory events provides opportunities for her to take advantage of the revelry and rise above Egdon's constraints, at least temporarily.

The carnival-like atmosphere of public events like yuletide celebrations yields a place that permits and even sanctions unconventional acts. Terry Castle explains the advantage a woman can gain simply by masquerading as a man:

> If middle-class women were expected to show few signs of sexual desire even within marriage, they were certainly not expected to show any outside it. Masquerades, one may speculate, provided a temporary if problematic release from such prescriptions. Under the effacements of costume women of the middle

> and upper classes had access to a unique realm of sexual freedom, and a kind of psychological latitude normally reserved for men. (44)

While Eustacia may scoff at the notion that propriety would never allow her to introduce herself to Clym Yeobright, she knows that she must develop some kind of scheme to arrange a meeting with this man whom she believes will be her ticket to escape. When Eustacia learns of Clym's imminent return from Paris and his mother's Christmas party in his honor, she realizes that her previous snobbish attitude towards the heath's inhabitants will prevent her receiving an invitation:

> She was a stranger to all such local gatherings, and had always held them as scarcely appertaining to her sphere. But had she been going, what an opportunity would have been afforded her of seeing the man whose influence was penetrating her like summer sun! (*RN* 111)

However, she will not allow her behavior towards the Heath's inhabitants to defeat her. She utilizes her feminine charms to convince her father's worker Charley to let her take his place in the Christmas mummery; "a quarter of an hour" of holding her hand and permission to "kiss it too" (RN 113) represents ample payment for Charley. Although "[h]e was three years younger than herself, he was apparently not backward for his age" (RN 113). This brief episode shows how a working class man of the lower realm of society can turn events to gain power over someone of the upper class. At this moment Eustacia admires his opportunism and allows him to have his way, albeit temporarily.

Eustacia gains first-hand experience with masculine power when she occupies the male body, and only a carnivalesque event like the Christmas mummery gives her that perspective. Boumelha asserts Eustacia's gain of sexual freedom by playing the role of the Turkish knight:

"When she is doubly disguised in her mumming costume, she experiences the interdependence of her sexuality and her identity" (55). She successfully completes her lines and boldly enters into a sword fight with the "Valiant Soldier" (RN 134), Slasher:

> And fight they did; the issue of the combat being that the Valiant Soldier was slain by a preternaturally inadequate thrust from Eustacia, Jim, in his ardour for genuine histrionic art, coming down like a log upon the stone floor with force enough to dislocate his shoulder. Then, after more words from the Turkish Knight, rather too faintly delivered, and statements that he'd fight Saint George and all his crew, Saint George himself magnificently entered with the well-known flourish. (*RN* 134)

Eustacia's unimpressive performance as a sword-wielding knight still works to her advantage. Her masculine role of knight provides entry to a social event that would have otherwise excluded her. One must also note the gender reversal inherent to her function as penetrator of a male as she plunges her sword into the "Valiant Soldier" (55). One reaches a striking awareness of the importance of Eustacia's carnivalesque role reversal as it pertains to her utilization of this quintessentially masculine persona of jousting knight to place herself in the empowered position of pursuer: "In literally becoming a performer Eustacia takes on a decisively masculine role, and not just in the sense that she plays the part of a male character. She abandons passivity and waiting in favor of initiative and action" (Thomas 57-8). Her transformation from female to male, from penetrated to penetrator, from passive to active, represents the systematic inversion of the carnivalesque as defined by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White:

> Inversion addresses the social classification of values, distinctions and judgements [sic] which underpin practical reason and systematically inverts the relations of

> subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave. (56)

Hardy's depiction of Eustacia as a dangerously transgressive female relies on this Bakhtinian carnivalesque representation, and the limitations that drive her also become poignantly clear.

The anonymity gained from wearing a mask achieves much in allowing one to behave in a manner outside of one's norm. Castle explores the concept of disguise as it pertains to deceit and travesty:

> Disguise, when unveiled is perceived as profoundly anti-social; witness the persistent association between the mask and criminality, travesty and treachery. The cheek of the masquerade was that it both sanctioned such deceit and suffused it with a kind of euphoria. Blatantly, joyfully, masqueraders subverted the myth of the legible body by sending false sartorial messages. (Castle 57)

Eustacia's temporary inversion of gender roles serves as a humorous travesty of the archetypal knight in shining armor as she plays the part with her small voice and half-hearted sword thrust. This particular charade overwhelms her with a mixture of feelings that she had yet to experience on Egdon Heath:

> At moments during this performance Eustacia was half in doubt about the security of her position; yet it had a fearful joy. A series of attentions paid to her, and yet not to her but to some imaginary person by the first man she had ever been inclined to adore, complicated her emotions indescribably. She had undoubtedly begun to love him. (*RN* 141)

The mask Eustacia dons for her role in the mummery provides her with freedom to pursue the object of her desire, and the "fearful joy" she experiences adds even more excitement to the

moment: "As her 'fearful joy' suggests, she is also more than half in love with the 'performance' itself, with concealment, indirection, and obliqueness'" (Thomas 61). Certainly the fear of discovery adds to the thrilling sensation. Nonetheless, the confusion caused by the disguise "complicate[s]" her emotions, for she must wonder if the attention she receives from Clym is really for her. Therefore, the mask performs a dual role; it draws his attention, and it fuels what she believes to be love for him. Compared to Eustacia's mundane existence on the heath, this episode of uncertainty stimulates her passions, a sensation of which she has recently only dreamed. For a brief period, she experiences male liberty and the pleasure of pursuit.

Hardy utilizes the scene of the mummery to emphasize how a woman must always hide behind a mask instead of simply stating her desires: "In matters of the heart, of course, a becoming shyness – the downcast eyes of the modest and sequestered maiden – is the conventionally appropriate attitude for young Victorian women" (Thomas 57). The irony of the mask is that it also vexes Eustacia when she witnesses Clym's attention to Thomasin: "Eustacia was nettled by her own contrivances. What a sheer waste of herself to be dressed thus while another was shining to advantage!" (*RN* 129). When Clym later directly asks her if she is a woman, she realizes that while her knightly attire did indeed gain her admittance to the party, according to Clym, all she had to do was ask for an invitation: "I would gladly have asked you to our party had I known you wished to come" (*RN* 130). Clym misleads Eustacia and even himself into thinking that he is open-minded enough that in a relationship with him, she can reveal her true nature. However, Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright's hesitance to reveal the news of Thomasin's scandalous marriage debacle suggest otherwise. A rebellious woman like Eustacia knows it is more advantageous to wear the mask. Bakhtin's explanation of the function of the mask proves insightful to Eustacia's experience:

> The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. (40)

The Christmas mummery represents a clear metamorphosis in Eustacia's life; although it is not the one she imagines. She violates the boundaries that divide masculine and feminine behavior. Hardy shows that the tragedy of this violation lies in the fact that rules of conformity force one to deny her true self in order to "get excitement and shake off depression" (*RN* 130). Clym's remark upon learning that Eustacia is a woman shows his confusion regarding her choice of roleplaying: "It is a strange way of meeting, and I will not ask why I find a cultivated woman playing such a part as this" (*RN* 131). Since she is "a cultivated woman," why would she need to lower herself by participating in a mummery? Barbara Ehrenreich provides insight into the attraction that disguise holds for individuals who wish to remove themselves from the restrictions of their everyday lives:

> Anyone with a mind for rebellion could see the advantages of the carnival setting, with its routine disorder, masks to conceal the perpetrators' faces, and enough beer or wine to confound the local constabulary. And if there was no convenient holiday in the offing, people again and again dressed up their rebellions in the trappings of carnival: masks, even full costumes, and almost always the music of bells, bagpipes, drums. (Ehrenreich 104)

Eustacia indeed dresses up her rebellion against societal obstacles that exclude her sex from any show of assertion, and this rebellion works for her as long as she remains behind the mask.

Just as the mask is essential to the unfolding of Hardy's narrative, the act of seeing and being seen also represents a central theme in *The Return of the* Native. Ironically the mummery allows Eustacia to see Clym before he is able to see her, a situation that represents another role reversal. Echoing the acts of the sonneteers who spent hours gazing upon their beloved, Eustacia "becomes increasingly fixated on the idea of actually *seeing* Clym" (Smith 57), and she "refus[es] simply to wait for Clym to reveal himself to her (Smith 57). Brian Smith comments on how Eustacia's ability to look upon Clym without his knowing becomes an enactment of her desire: "'seeing' becomes in fact a kind of obsession in the text, almost a form of desire in its own right,'" (57).

Additionally, Eustacia's signal fires for Wildeve allow him to see that she desires his presence: "I have come,' said the man, who was Wildeve. 'You give me no peace. Why do you not leave me alone? I have seen your bonfire all evening'" (*RN* 54). Certainly, Eustacia's ability to summon the object of her desire, apparently against his will, demonstrates a reversal of masculine/feminine sexual roles. She exerts her power over him, and he cannot help but submit. Many of the inhabitants of the heath also witness the spectacle of Eustacia's fire, but Wildeve is the object over which she wields control.

Hardy again utilizes a public carnival in his depiction of the "village picnic – a gipsying, they call it" (*RN* 233). This annual event provides respite for Eustacia and temporary escape from the oppressive weight of Clym's vision loss, a disability that has essentially eradicated her dreams of escaping Egdon. Clym hesitantly agrees for her to go without him: "Yes, perhaps I am jealous; and who could be jealous with more reason than I, a half-blind man, over such a woman as you" (*RN* 231). Yet, he tells her to "go alone and shine," encouraging her to display her beauty (*RN* 231). At this particular event the villagers take on a Dionysian kind of revelry:

> A whole village-full of sensuous emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, surged here in a focus for an hour. The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together, they had come together in similar jollity. For the time of Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in and they adored none other than themselves. (*RN* 236)

The pagan mood of the annual gipsying frees individuals from their day-to-day limitations and allows the participants to revel in the frenzy of the moment: "The ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, abolishing the habitual barriers and boundaries of existence, actually contains, for its duration, a lethargic element into which all past personal experience is plunged" (Nietzsche 39). As Eustacia and Wildeve are caught up in the exhilaration and sensuality of the dance, Hardy makes a direct reference to the resulting brief respite from society's rules, thus overturning convention:

> Thus, for different reasons, what was to the rest an exhilarating movement was to these two a riding upon the whirlwind. The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds, to drive them back into old paths which were now doubly irregular. (*RN* 238)

The dance also acts as a kind of masquerade for Eustacia because no one in the crowd recognizes her except Wildeve, and she basks in the passionate feelings that anonymity and the frenzy of the dance itself allow:

> Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register. (*RN* 235)

These moments of freedom and performance before an audience who holds no recognition, hence no harmful judgment, remove all of the restrictions of social order and even marriage, and the couple immerses themselves in the thrilling pleasure of the dance. Hardy characterizes the scene of the gipsying as the last moment of ecstasy that Eustacia will experience. Henceforth, events bend themselves towards tragedy because in the Victorian world of Hardy's novel, overturning boundaries carries the harshest of consequences.

Unfortunately, Eustacia pays the ultimate price for her unconventionality as Hardy "depicts, in overwhelmingly negative terms, the destructive capacities of a community that cannot tolerate individuals – particularly women – who transgress social dictates for behavior" (Malton 154). Hardy's novel as public portrayal of Eustacia's demise reveals to his audience that Victorian society, while modern in so many ways, falls short when it comes to women whose desires for self-definition surpass the societal boundaries that the time period continues to embrace. However, a positive aspect does exist, and that recompense rests in Hardy's characterization of Eustacia as a female who possesses a painful awareness of the limitations defined by her gender, yet one who still continues to chafe against those limitations.

In *Jude the Obscure* Sue Bridehead, unlike Eustacia, performs most of her carnivalesque acts in private, thus invoking the domestic carnivalesque. Sue's punishment for her rebelliousness is harsh to the point of repulsing Hardy's reading audience, and apparently shock and revulsion are Hardy's intentions as he weaves a relentless tale of disappointment, disillusionment, and ultimately tragedy for a couple who wants to experience life according to ideals that have no place in Victorian society: "The novel's characterizing tone is bitterness seemingly unmediated because the narrator shares the characters' sense of outrage that society censures both their unconventional sexual relations and their idealism" (Kramer 164). Sue's

domestic misdeeds serve to emphasize her personal frustration and to underscore Hardy's disdain for a society that forces individuals to hide their natural inclinations, thus engendering feelings of guilt and oppression.

As in *Return of the Native*, the institution of marriage proves problematic for the characters, but to an even more extreme degree. Victorian society is not ready for idealistic natures like Jude and Sue who believe that loving the company and companionship of another outweighs the dogma of an institution. Arabella comments that since Jude and Sue appear so happy at the fair, they cannot be married, suggesting that marriage and happiness do not go together. Conveniently, Arabella overlooks the fact that she also lives with a man to whom she is not married, but her lower class status ironically gives her more freedom and subjects her to fewer expectations. Even she judges Sue because she knows that Sue's behavior is unacceptable for a woman of Sue's status. Class difference allows Arabella to escape unscathed while Sue must suffer for her transgressions. Jude and Sue have made the choice to be together because of a mutual affection that is not based on sexual gratification or bound by law. Jude proclaims that lust lies at the root of conventional marriage: "People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort" (*JO* 272). Sue then adds a female perspective to the same argument: "Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes – a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without" (*JO* 273). Perhaps by this final foray into novel writing, Hardy has abandoned all subtlety in depicting the restraints of Victorian institutions as paralyzing and inhumane torture as he alludes to the pitiful experience of a trapped rabbit that would prefer to tear its leg "in two in attempts at an impossible escape" (*JO* 225)

rather than submit to imprisonment. Jude later compares marriage to "devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress" (*JO* 228). Hardy references the negative response to his depiction of marriage as a trap in his direct response to criticism in the novel's Preface:

> I have been charged since 1895 with a large responsibility in this country for the present 'shop-soiled' condition of the marriage theme. . . ., that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties – being then essentially and morally no marriage – and it seemed a good foundation for the fable of a tragedy, told for its own sake as a presentation of particulars containing a good deal that was universal, and not without a hope that certain cathartic, Aristotelian qualities might be found therein. (Preface *JO* 6)

One can see that a major goal in the novel is to overturn convention by bombarding the reader with disappointment and loss, so shocking that it cannot help but evoke pity and fear for these victims of the prevailing prejudice and negativity towards those who do not conform to the rules of society's institutions. Scenes of rebellion thread throughout the novel as the characters attempt to navigate the treacherous waters of society's strict rule. Certainly moments of empowerment are short-lived for Sue and Jude, but they seize upon them with a stronghold born of desperation and a large measure of perseverance until unimaginable loss puts them in their place for good. However, Arabella, who moves through life never giving her own lack of propriety a second thought, prevails in the end.

Sue is a woman who desires freedom above all else. Unfortunately, that desire alone destines her for disappointment, for there is no such thing as a free woman of the middle class in

Victorian England. Success for a woman of her ilk lies in marriage, an institution she comes to abhor:

> I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one had done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit, and I kick. . . . When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say! (*JO* 227)

Sue does indeed kick at the constraints of marriage, and when her marriage to Richard Phillotson becomes so unbearable, her response to the threat of intimacy with him represents performance so extreme that it reverses even Phillotson's belief in the sanctity of the institution:

> The climax came last night, when, owing to my entering her room by accident, she jumped out of window – so strong was her dread of me! She pretended it was a dream, but that was to soothe me. Now when a woman jumps out of a window without caring whether she breaks her neck or no, she's not to be mistaken; and this being the case I have come to the conclusion: that it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may. (*JO* 242)

The extravagant act of jumping out of a window to escape having sex with her husband is so outrageous that it can only be described as a domestic form of carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy, but it becomes public when Phillotson shares the event with his friend Gillingham. Additionally, her act works to upset Phillotson's own long-held convictions and provokes him to look beyond them and realize that marriage should be more than "merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger" (*JO* 243). At that moment he achieves an understanding of the superiority of Jude and Sue's relationship: "And to the best of my

understanding it is not an ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two: that is the worst of it; because it makes me think theirs will be enduring. . . . Their supreme desire is to be together – to share each other's emotions, and fancies, and dreams" (*JO* 244). While legally he has the power to confine her to their marriage, he chooses setting her free over continuing life in such misery.

Sue claims to have avoided intimacy with Phillotson because of something about him that she found repulsive; however, her philosophical attempt to place sexual intimacy in an intellectual and political context rather than in the embarrassing context of sensuality provides more valuable insight into her avoidance of sex with her husband. Morgan posits that Hardy uses Sue's efforts "to air the related questions of the social and psychological conditioning of women and their sexual exploitation in marriage" (125). For Sue, submitting sexually to any man implies losing something of herself, a sacrifice she chooses not to make to Phillotson at this point: "Sue's time with Phillotson has taught her to recognize the gap between the identity imposed by society and her real inner self" (Jacobus 307). Hence, because she wants to salvage some sense of autonomy, she rebels against the traditional notion of the submissive and obedient Victorian wife.

Sue's rebellion against the decorum of her gender, however, begins much earlier in her life. In fact, Drusilla Fawley traces it all the way back to her childhood, noting that "[s]he was brought up by her father to hate her mother's family" (*JO* 117). Clearly the girl's aversion to marriage can be traced back to her earliest upbringing. Mrs. Fawley's memories of juvenile Sue contain quite a repertoire of disobedience and behavior unbecoming to a female:

> A pert little thing, that's what she was too often, with her tight-strained nerves. Many's the time I've smacked her for her impertinence. Why, one day when she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats

> pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame,she said: "Move on, Aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes." (*JO* 117)

Certainly Sue as a twelve-year-old girl understands that her behavior shocks "modest eyes" as she mocks all that it means to be a girl. Stallybrass and White's reference to Barbara Babcock's *The Reversible World* elucidates the notion that Sue's behavior inverts Mrs. Fawley's standards of proper feminine behavior: "'Symbolic inversion' may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms" (qtd. in Stallybrass & White 17). If Sue's exposure of her undergarments is not enough to show the young girl's misbehavior, Mrs. Fawley adds another episode to confirm her point:

> She was not exactly a tomboy, you know; but she could do things that only boys do, as a rule. I've seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond, with her curls blowing, one of a file of twenty. . . . All boys except herself; and then they'd cheer her, and then she'd say, "Don't be saucy, boys," and suddenly run indoors. (*JO* 119)

Even in her youth Sue sensed the moment when the opposite sex took notice of her beyond the outward aspect of another playmate, and when that attraction became evident, she removed herself from their gaze. She realizes that indeed she can act like one of the boys, but the boys' gaze tells her that different rules apply to her, and her acting outside of her conventional role may get her into trouble. One can see Sue's confusion and ambiguity regarding her sex emerging even in her childhood. From childhood into adulthood Sue's choices regarding her own body are limited. She may overturn authority sometimes, but the world-upside-down is never permanent.

Sue learns that relationships with men always carry the potential for loss of power and self-determination for Victorian women. When she befriends a male student in order to gain access to books, he wants more from her than friendship. When she partners with Phillotson to gain teaching experience, he develops an attraction for her; when she runs away from the Melchester School, causing her scandalous expulsion, she feels forced to marry Phillotson, and when she and Jude finally have the freedom to be together, Jude uses her jealousy of Arabella to manipulate her into a sexual relationship that signals the beginning of both of their downfalls because children complicate matters, and their presence ultimately ends the couple's rebellion against society's rules. She and Jude can survive being outcasts because of their unconventional lifestyle, but their children literally do not survive, and for their loss, Sue shoulders the blame.

A pertinent question that should be clarified at this point may be, "How does Hardy's portrayal of Sue's attempt to live happily outside the institution of marriage connect with the carnivalesque?" Sue's creation of spectacle, whether public or private, works to subvert hierarchical and patriarchal modes of existence. Bakhtin discusses that which he terms Rabelaisian images as those images that fall under the realm of "nonconformity" (2). Sue refuses to conform to not only the institution of marriage, but her subversive statements regarding religion display what the Victorian audience would have called blasphemy. When she and Phillotson accompany a group of students to view an exhibition of a model of Jerusalem, Sue diminishes the value of such a display by remarking, "I fancy we have had enough of Jerusalem, considering we are not descended from the Jews. There was nothing first rate about the place, or people, after all – as there was about Athens, Rome, Alexandria, and other old cities" (JO 113). Even here Sue inverts the ecclesiastical hierarchy by placing pagans in a superior position to Christians. Sue's discourse concerning institutions that her society reveres

emphasizes her nonconformist personality, but also poignantly reveals her deep-seated desire for freedom.

Stallybrass and White's exploration of authorship and discourse adds insight into how Hardy's portrayal of Sue and how the book itself can function in a carnivalesque manner. Discussing the relationship between "discursive space" and "social place," Stallybrass and White note that " An utterance is legitimated or disregarded according to its place of production and so, in a large part, the history of political struggle has been the history of the attempts made to control significant sites of assembly and spaces of discourse" (80). In *Jude* Hardy's portrayal of Sue's domestic overturning of hierarchical structures provide evidence of her struggle to rise above the political and social forces that work to define the role of women in her world. Sue does not want to be looked upon as an object to be possessed, and therein rests the root of her dilemma. Stallybrass and White's analysis of sites of assembly adds credence to the notion that transgression of boundaries can occur in any place where people are assembled, both public and private, and these acts can be played out in behavior that turns the world of rules and mores upside down. One can also argue that authorship itself represents a spectacle, by which the writer attempts to transform popular belief systems by overturning them through the actions of characters. By the time in his career when he wrote, *Jude*, "Hardy's income from royalties looked sufficiently large and sufficiently stable to enable him, in those non-inflationary times, to think of abandoning prose fiction in favour of that return to poetry he had contemplated for so long" (Millgate 346). Since *Jude* is Hardy's final novel, he determines to speak his mind and "denounce once and for all, those denials of educational and sexual justice . . . that he saw as widely present and everywhere implicit in the British class system, ..." (Millgate 346). Hardy's novel unquestionably challenges prevalent opinions of his day concerning marriage, the

treatment of women, and the exclusion of the poor from educational opportunities. He accomplishes these subversive ideas through his blatant representation of Sue and Jude's struggle, especially by having Sue's utterances and actions denounce those stifling conventions.

An important example of Sue's unique domestic carnivalesque occurs when she purchases two pagan statuettes, one of Venus and one of Apollo, from a roadside vender. Once she makes the purchase, Sue feels quite anxious about her impulsiveness, but that anxiety does not prevent her from carrying out her own private ritual with the statues:

> When they were paid for, and the man had gone, she began to be concerned as to what she would do with them. They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. Being of a nervous temperament she trembled at her enterprise. . . . "Well anything is better than those everlasting church fallals!" she said. But she was still in a trembling state, and seemed almost to wish she had not bought the figures. (*JO* 99-100)

However, that night in the privacy of her bedroom, Sue unpacks the statuettes and performs her own pagan ritual:

> . . .; and at bedtime, when she was sure of being undisturbed, she unrobed the divinities in comfort. Placing the pair of figures on a chest of drawers, a candle on each side of them, she withdrew to the bed, flung herself down thereon, and began reading a book she had taken from her box, which Miss Fontover knew nothing of. It was a volume of Gibbon, and she read the chapter dealing with the reign of Julian the Apostate. (*JO* 101)

Sue's performance shows the seditious element of her character as she reads about Rome's "last pagan" as Venus and Apollo figuratively observe, "in odd contrast to their environment of text

and martyr, and the Gothic-framed Crucifix-picture that was only discernible now as a Latin cross" (*JO* 102). Hardy wants the Victorian reader to witness Sue's unorthodox spirituality. Yet he also realizes that a public performance of such a ritual by a Victorian female would not be believable in the realm of his novel; thus, he uses his art to create this domestic or private form of the carnivalesque. Stallybrass and White attest to such revisions of the carnivalesque as it occurs in art:

> There is now a large and increasing body of writing which sees carnival not simply as a ritual feature of European culture but as a mode of understanding, a positivity, a cultural analytic. . . . Is there a connection between the fact of its elimination as a physical practice and its self-conscious emergence in the artistic and academic discourse of our time? (6)

Hardy's art reveals to his reading audience Sue's unconventionality, yet also shows her nervous discomfort with the personal risks intrinsic to such behaviors. Unlike many other women, Sue analyzes her personal beliefs in comparison to the doctrines to which women of her time are taught to adhere. She possesses a philosophy about life that differs from a society that "only recognizes relations based on animal desire" (*JO* 177). The narrator observes that Sue's ability "to talk learnedly" is clearly linked to her being "mistress of herself" (*JO* 177). However, her independent thoughts and actions are unacceptable and temporary. Certainly Hardy makes a poignant comparison between Sue's intellectual examination of her own motives and their destructive consequences to Arabella's earthy and pragmatic, survivalist view of life. Mickelson aptly describes how characters like Sue suffer from feelings of alienation because they do not fit in with the traditions of their society: "Hardy's men and women are the intelligent, the sensitive and the economically insecure who are caught in an order against which they must chafe or be

spiritually crushed" (22). Ultimately, Sue's spirit is crushed, but not before she valiantly attempts to live her life according to her rules rather than those of society. Her dilemma is indeed a tragic one. She must either follow her own belief system or acquiesce to society's rules.

In addition to private displays of the carnivalesque, Hardy frames Sue and Jude's itinerant time as a couple with public fairs, first at Shaston, then at Stoke-Barehills, at Kinnetbridge, and finally at Christminster. Stallybrass and White's description of rural fairs and their notoriety as places of transgression provide illumination on their importance in *Jude*:

> Of course, small rural fairs might be primarily marts for the hiring of labour on Lady Day or the exchange of purely local produce, but even the smallest fair juxtaposed both people and objects which were normally kept separate and thus provided a taste of life beyond the narrow horizons of the town or village. Part of the transgressive excitement of the fair for the subordinate classes was *not* its "otherness" to official discourse, but rather the disruption of provincial habits and local tradition by the introduction of a certain cosmopolitanism, arousing desires and excitements for exotic and strange commodities. The fair "turned the world inside out" in its mercantilist aspect just as much, if not more, than it "turned the world upside down" in popular rituals. (37)

Fairs and festivals provide freedom from normal inhibitions and boundaries, a freedom that exists for the duration of the event. There exists a certain anonymity in the crowds of carnival that allows people to move about without worrying about being under scrutiny. Thus at the fair, Jude and Sue "went along with that tender attention to each other which the shyest can scarcely disguise, and which these, among entire strangers, as they imagined, took less trouble to disguise than they might have done at home" (*JO* 306). The topsy-turvy world of the fair denotes a place

of freedom and acceptance for Sue and Jude on one hand, but it also serves as a significant marker of pending change for the now transient couple.

The first of the three fairs/public celebrations that illustrates important moments in Sue and Jude's lives is at Shaston, a transitory town closely aligned with change and movement. Hardy includes a detailed description of the Shaston fair in this section to connect Shaston to Sue's separation and eventual divorce, indicating a place where unconventional happenings occur:

> There was another peculiarity – this a modern one – which Shaston appeared to owe to its site. It was the resting-place and headquarters of the proprieters of wandering vans, shows, shooting-galleries, and other itinerant concerns, whose business lay largely at fairs and markets. As strange wild birds are seen assembled on some lofty promontory, meditatively pausing for longer flights, or to return by the course they followed thither, so here, in this cliff-town, stood in stultified silence the yellow and green caravans bearing names not local, as if surprised by a change in landscape so violent as to hinder their further progress; and here they usually remained all the winter till they returned to seek again their old tracks in the following spring. (*JO* 211)

Hardy's tagging of Shaston as "modern" symbolizes the uncanny events that happen in this carnival town. All manner of travelers inhabit this carnival town, and it seems fitting that such settings serve as markers of significant change and upheaval in Sue and Jude's lives. The impermanence of these "itinerant concerns" underscores the fleeting quality of Sue and Jude's brief period of happiness and foreshadows their ultimate unhappy return to their "old tracks." The setting encompasses Sue's jumping out of the window to avoid Phillotson's advances, their

separation, and finally his agreeing to grant her a divorce. It is at Shaston also that she makes the choice to reunite with Jude.

Aldbrickham and Stoke-Barehills mark another location in which the relationship between Jude and Sue undergoes a transformation. Here their relationship moves from platonic to sexual, and here they take in Arabella and Jude's child, Little Father Time. It is also in this place that they are happiest. It is no mistake that Hardy includes another public event at this juncture of their travels. They attend the Great Wessex Agricultural Show with its

> [r]ows of marquees, huts, booths, pavilions, arcades, porticoes – every kind of structure short of a permanent one – cover the green field for the space of a square half-mile, and the crowds of arrivals walk through the town in a mass, and make straight for the exhibition ground. The way thereto is lined with shows, stalls, and hawkers on foot, who make a market-place of the whole roadway to the show proper, (*JO* 305)

Bakhtin describes carnival as being "filled with the pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities" (11). Sue and Jude exemplify the happy young couple, she "in her new summer clothes, flexible and light as a bird," and Jude, "in his light grey holiday-suit, . . . really proud of her companionship." They share a "complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, [making] them almost the two parts of a single whole" (*JO* 306). The time between them comes as close to perfect as it will ever be, even with the addition of Jude and Arabella's child, as they "try every means of making him kindle and laugh like other boys" (*JO* 306). Their attractive appearance and obvious affection for each other draws the attention of other passersby, including Arabella and her husband. Arabella cattily remarks, "How she sticks

to him! Oh no – I fancy they are not married, or they wouldn't be so much to one another as that . . . . I wonder!" (*JO* 306). Arabella, in her earthy philosophy, knows that conventional marriages lack the honest affection that Sue and Jude have for one another. The fair encourages freedom from inhibitions and worries about society's judgment, and Hardy uses this setting to show his reading audience how happy a couple can be when "prevailing truths and authorities" are diminished. Surely, Hardy purposefully includes the scene to show how life could be if Victorian society would allow unmarried couples to live their lives in peace without casting aspersions. Perhaps more than any other carnivalesque expression in the novel, this beautiful and touchingly short-lived time for Jude's family functions to overturn staid and outworn views about the institution of marriage. During this happy interlude, Sue tells Jude, "I feel that we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow, and have forgotten what twenty-five centuries have taught the race since their time," (*JO* 312). However, Father Time reminds them that nothing lasts forever: "I should like the flowers very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days!" (*JO* 312).

As is always the case, carnivalesque joy is only temporary, and the higher realm regains its position of authority, and the world supposedly rights itself. Such is the case when the festive atmosphere of the fair is over, and the couple returns unmarried to Aldbrickham:

> The unnoticed lives that the pair had hitherto led began, from the day of the suspended wedding onwards, to be observed and discussed by other persons than Arabella. The society of Spring Street and the neighbourhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions, and fears. (*JO* 312)

Here Hardy points to the sad truth that society does not concern itself with the thoughts, motives, or feelings of individuals. It only cares about maintaining it rules of propriety and decorum. When Sue and Jude's lifestyle becomes public knowledge, they become outcasts from society. Thus ensues two and a half years of "shifting, almost nomadic, life, which was not without its pleasantness for a time" for the couple (*JO* 324).

Fairs and celebrations continue to serve as time markers for the couple, as their unconventional lifestyle draws more and more attention. Another fair at Kennetbridge indicates a turning point in the couple's lives: "It was the spring fair at Kennetbridge, and, though this ancient trade-meeting had much dwindled from its dimensions of former times, the long straight street of the borough presented a lively scene about midday" (*JO* 325). Sue, now with three children and expecting another, runs into Arabella, and Arabella informs Phillotson about the couple's present situation. Arabella, now a church-going woman, admonishes Phillotson for releasing Sue, reminding him of the importance of controlling wayward women:

> She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! It's all the same in the end! However, I think she's fond of her man still – whatever he med be of her. You were too quick about her. I shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on – her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women. Beside, you've got the laws on your side. (*JO* 334)

Although Arabella's life has been far from traditional, ironically, she speaks the attitude of Victorian society when it comes to judging Sue and Jude's lifestyle. Hardy aptly chooses Arabella in her uneducated dialect to be the spokesperson for Victorian conventionality. Her utterance underscores Hardy's views on the constraints of marriage, while working to undermine

conventionality by having it described in such a backwards, hypocritical fashion by one who has repeatedly broken social strictures about marriage.

The couple's final location as a family is a return to Christminster, where yet another celebration is in progress: "The plays seems gay,' said Sue. 'Why – it is Remembrance Day! – Jude – how sly of you – you came today on purpose!'" (*JO* 339). However, this celebration gives the couple no joy, as Jude draws attention to his family by engaging in a loud confrontation with former acquaintances about his previous personal failures at Christminster, and property owners repeatedly turn the couple away from lodgings, claiming to have no room or refusing to admit an unescorted pregnant woman with children. The episode recalls the biblical tale of no-room-at-the-inn for the parents of Jesus. The parallel that Hardy makes between the two stories is undeniable. What is wrong with a society that turns away a pregnant mother and her young children? How is society complicit in the children's deaths? Ultimately, the final landlady learns of Sue's unmarried status and turns them out, fortifying Little Father Time's belief that this world holds no place for children. It is here at Christminster, the town on which Jude had once placed all of his former hopes, where the most horrible of all punishments falls upon the couple:

> At the back of the door were two fixed hooks for hanging garments, and from these the forms of the two youngest children were suspended, by a piece of boxcord around each of their necks, while from a nail a few yards off the body of little Jude was hanging in a similar manner. (*JO* 353)

Sue's tragic declaration, while uttered with self-flagellating intent, represents a great overturning of religious and societal mores that destroy the innocent: "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men!" (*JO* 355). Nemesvari's commentary regarding Father Time's murder/suicide proves particularly enlightening to the notion that Hardy intended to shock his

audience into awareness by creating this horrific spectacle: "The novel's employment of excess, whether, physical, emotional, or psychological, is consistent from start to finish, so that this terrible moment is the culmination of a pattern crucial to Hardy's rhetorical purpose, and not an incongruity" (Nemesvari 181). Nemesvari's further analysis includes mention of the hybrid nature of the event:

> The goal of this hybrid form, however, is not an abstract catharsis, but rather a very specific pity and fear laced with anger and a sense of waste, producing a desire to change the materialist structures that the novel presents as destructively oppressive. (Nemesvari 181-82)

Nemesvari's use of the term hybrid brings to mind Stallybrass and White's analysis of the carnivalesque and hybridization. The fact that this tragedy occurs in the midst of a town's celebratory event underscores the importance of carnival settings to Hardy's narrative. Hardy makes the point via spectacle and carnival that society's stubborn adherence to dogmatic rules of decorum with no regard for individual circumstances and beliefs results in a destructive outcome. For Hardy, the tragedy lies in society itself, and his own comparison of this narrative to Greek tragedy supports the notion that participants should emerge from a tragedy with greater knowledge of their flaws.

Fairs and celebrations create an atmosphere much like that of the marketplace, a crossroads, a place where difference is on display, a place where all kinds of people come together, "a point of economic and cultural intersection" (Stallybrass & White 38). Stallybrass and White's explanation of hybridization further clarifies the importance of fairs and celebratory loci to the plot of *Jude*:

> Hybridization, a second and more complex form of the grotesque than the simply excluded "outside" or "low" to a given grid, produces new combinations and strange instabilities in a given semiotic system. It therefore generates the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it. In practice we often find hybridization, inversion and demonization mixed up together. (58)

The fairs in *Jude* each create a situation that provokes the audience to interrogate judgments and exclusions implicit to Victorian society. The destabilization of institutions like marriage and religion may indeed "shift *the very terms of the system*" but not for Sue. Boumelha claims, "Only Mona Caird and Hardy, among the more widely-read novelists dealing with this issue, draw attention to its coercive role in the reproduction of the nuclear family unit" (153), the issue being the social forces of marriage and childbearing upon the lives of women. Elizabeth Langland adds an even stronger conviction regarding Hardy's purpose in writing *Jude*, revealing "the painful immediacy of experience and the terrible ways in which personal limitations combine with social limitations to produce a disaster which no philosophy can redeem" (28).

Any joy that Sue and Jude experience while engaged in their non-traditional relationship is indeed temporary, just like the topsy-turvy atmosphere at carnival time when the low displaces the high. Once the carnival moves to the next venue, individuals in the community must return to their prescribed roles. For Sue and Jude, the show stops at Christminster, and Sue leaves behind the "woman-poet," the "woman-seer," the "woman whose soul shone like a diamond – whom all the wise of world would have been proud of, if they could have known" (*JO* 369).

In both *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy presents women who are caught in the midst of a struggle between the women they really are and the women society

demands them to be. Through both private and public carnivalesque scenes, they each enjoy brief moments of freedom as they transgress society's rules of proper decorum for Victorian women. However, the England of Hardy's day will only tolerate so much transgression before placing a wayward woman back in her place, a lesson Sue learns all too well. However, Eustacia resolves to make a permanent escape from those boundaries, and the last view of her lends validity to the notion that even death is preferable to her previous confinement:

> The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. . . . The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background. (*RN* 342)

Hardy's descriptive use of an "artistically happy background" confirms the opinion that conforming to prescriptive roles runs counter to art and happiness, and that one should always seize the opportunity to shake the world up a bit by turning it upside down.

Chapter 3 – Vision, Voice, and Knowledge as Carnivalesque: Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South and Charlotte Bronte's Shirley*

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as a "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life (15). Such suspensions of the social power dynamic allow those who are normally part of the lower rungs of society to gain temporary freedoms they would not normally possess. Certainly, Bakhtin's original reference to the carnivalesque in his seminal work, *Rabelais and His World,* depends on the idea of the literal carnival time. Carnival time always carries the connotation of lowered inhibitions that allow the attendees greater freedom of self-expression, and more importantly, power shifts from the upper realm of society to the lower. It is important to note that Bakhtin also includes notions of "ritual and spectacle" (19) in his definition. For Bakhtin, the spectacle or "grotesque image" (24) "reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (24). Viewers of such spectacles gain a brief glimpse of how such a transformed society may appear. Carnivalesque theory may be extended beyond literal instances of carnivals. Such an extended form can occur whenever any part of the lower realm of the social hierarchy creates or participates in a scene that temporarily destabilizes the authority of the upper realm. Ideas of transformation and becoming are foundational to the carnivalesque as an instrument for heightening awareness of issues that need to change. Bakhtin adds that the phenomenon establishes "an ideal and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life" (16). This unique opportunity for communication between the upper and lower class as portrayed in fiction reveals how female characters gain exposure to alternate perspectives and motivations. Therein lies a vehicle for change, transformation, and renewal.

According to carnivalesque theory, the order of the hierarchy ultimately returns but not before the observers and participants feel the effects of a shift of power. This chapter aims to analyze selected nineteenth century novels in order to see inversions of hierarchy serve to raise awareness of pertinent social issues concerning women and the working class. For example, during a worker uprising in which the workers demand to be heard and seen, the shift in power from high to low renders the owner temporarily unable to do anything but look and listen. These incidents lay the foundation for the more permanent phenomenon of social reform.

The specific focus of this chapter will be on two Condition-of-England Victorian novels in which female characters of the middle to upper class occasionally participate, but more often keenly observe behaviors of owners and the workers in the midst of a world upside down. These occurrences raise awareness of social issues of the day, and the female protagonists influence men in positions of power to make some changes in their dealings with, if not in their perspective of, the working class. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* deploy the power of the carnivalesque quite differently from Hardy's *Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*. In the two Hardy novels the female protagonists make themselves the spectacle. Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead commit transgressive acts that raise awareness of the plight of women and the institution of marriage in Hardy's reading audience. However, the stories do not end well for those characters, suggesting that Sue and Eustacia are not only marginalized because of their gender but also because of the time in which they live. However, Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar in Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* have access to vision and knowledge, and they utilize voice to influence male characters in ways that result in a positive outcome for the working class and suggest expanded roles for women in society. While Margaret, Caroline, and Shirley do indeed observe

carnivalesque actions in the working class, they also hold a vision of solutions that their male counterparts often lack. Additionally, they are able to share these solutions and still remain within the boundaries of their gender and class, and in so doing, escape the tragic consequences that Hardy's females suffer.

Victorian middle class women's social status depended on their adherence to a prescribed set of behaviors. Their role in society offered limited acceptable ways of spending one's time, for example, managing servants, visiting and caring for the poor or sick, tutoring or teaching, sewing and painting, and doing charitable works. Some of these activities placed them in environments that granted them access to and a greater understanding of the struggles of the lower class. The contact between women of the middle class and the impoverished enabled both groups to see that they shared a disenfranchisement born out of economic power, societal mores, and governmental systems of rule. Certainly the two groups did not share analogous lifestyles, but they shared some of the same struggles and constraints. The alignment of Victorian middle class women with the working class and the poor represents a crucial aspect of the argument that the carnivalesque occurs when these groups overturn the existing hierarchy by seizing power or by occupying a lead position, albeit temporarily. In *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900*, Philippa Levine acknowledges this partnership:

> Feminists of all political creeds were unhappy with the performances of successive governments, not merely in direct relation to women's questions but in their attitudes to a host of social and economic problems. Their analysis of those inadequacies rested on the unbalanced nature of representation which denied a voice to outsiders – women and the propertyless poor. (Levine 61)

Perhaps the marginal status that females share with the working class allows them a greater ability to operate on both sides of the line between the upper and lower realm of society. Gaskell and Bronte both depict female characters who speak out in defense of the working class even if they don't address issues regarding their own sex.

In addition, they each create female characters who keenly observe the people around them. Victorian constraints regarding feminine decorum contribute to a strong interest in watching because these same constraints prevent much in the way of doing. Through the act of observation, middle class women of the Victorian Age gain insight into what motivates the behaviors of others, specifically individuals of the working class. The market represents one setting that provides a good opportunity to observe people. Gathering places for the working class closely resemble Bakhtin's "culture of the marketplace" (Bakhtin 7), full of raucous voices and laughter, and free of the inhibitions that normal societal constraints levy. Bakhtin further describes this realm as "life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (7). Because the marketplace atmosphere is also a place for women, they observe the culture of the working class and can develop a clearer understanding and empathy for their situation. Caroline and Shirley of Bronte's *Shirley* and Margaret of Gaskell's *North and South* all possess these skills of observation. Both Bronte and Gaskell's female protagonists understand how to harness the power of the spectacle without incurring its damage; that is, they don't cross the boundaries of propriety and become part of a public spectacle. Instead, they gain insight by watching and then use their influence to help men in positions of power imagine a solution to their problems with workers. In so doing, they end up representing heroines instead of the tragic figures of Hardy's novels.

However, Gaskell and Bronte's females do struggle between loyalty to their male counterparts and a desire to correct the injustice they observe in the working poor and their families. Through their observation of the working class families' home lives and their additional witnessing of the occasional spectacle of worker rebellion, they envision solutions to problems in the workplace that the factory bosses are unable to conceive. These gatherings of workers to express their discontent can be termed carnivalesque because they briefly overturn the conventional hierarchical structure. The women who witness these subversive acts mediate in ways that men of the upper class cannot because women's role in society, simply due to their gender, provides them with a different kind of proximity to the working class. Middle class women gain power through hearing and seeing both sides of the labor issue because neither the owners nor the workers expect them to become key players in the conflict's outcome. Moreover, the working class believes they have nothing to fear from women, so they feel freer to communicate honestly. Additionally, the owners' relationship with the women supposedly falls under the conventions of Victorian courtship, so they underestimate the weight of female influence.

Generally, Victorian men would patently reject suggestions made by females concerning disgruntled workers, but Bronte and Gaskell show that the men have much to gain by listening. The topsy-turvy atmosphere of the worker uprising becomes a venue for workers to gain a voice that will eventually become loud enough to bring about change. *Shirley* and *North and South* portray women who understand the reason for the workers' discontent because they have witnessed the poverty in which they live, and these women often feel discontent regarding their own lives. The kinship that results from the commonality of dissatisfaction becomes an alliance that provokes those in power to reconsider the status quo. However, it is important to remember

that the core of the relationship between women and the working class lies in the acts of observing, sharing the same physical space, and communicating. In the words of Stallybrass and White, "women live 'on the wire', 'on the perimeter' neither fully outside nor fully inside" (24).

In *North and South*, Margaret learns how it feels to be on display when her Aunt Shaw insists that she bring down from the nursery "all [of Edith's] beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs" (Gaskell 9) that would now be part of Margaret's Cousin Edith's trousseau. Because Edith is napping, the occasion arises for Margaret to model the shawls for Aunt Shaw's lady guests:

> Her aunt asked her to stand as a sort of lay figure on which to display them, as Edith was still asleep. No one thought about it; but Margaret's tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father's, set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith. Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies. Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there – the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess. . . . Just then the door opened, and Mr. Henry Lennox was suddenly announced. Some of the ladies started back, as if half-ashamed of their feminine interest in dress. (Gaskell 11)

Perhaps the ladies feel embarrassed to be caught looking at the lovely spectacle Margaret makes and worry that Mr. Lennox will notice her beauty and favor her over her social superior, the sleeping Edith. Margaret shares a secret smile with Henry as she "look[s] at Mr. Lennox with a bright, amused face, as if sure of his sympathy in her sense of the ludicrousness at being thus surprised" (11). The shared understanding between Margaret and Henry raises her briefly to his

level as they simultaneously look down upon the frivolous ladies. Margaret certainly represents a spectacle in this scene, but she does so within a private home and with the approval of her so-called betters, thus avoiding admonition.

For this brief period Margaret occupies center stage as she stands under the spotlight of the chandelier for all to observe. She even enjoys observing herself in the mirror. Because Margaret's position is inferior to that of her spoiled cousin Edith, the hierarchy of female position is briefly overturned, and the lowly rises to the top as Margaret proves to display the Indian shawls in a much finer manner because they would have "half-smothered" Edith (11). Of course, Margaret does not view herself as an empowered spectacle; she simply enjoys the transformation of usual self into a "princess" (11) for a fleeting moment. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin explains how participants in the overturning of hierarchy do not think of themselves as spectacles; they simply relish the sensation while it lasts: "In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (Bakhtin 7). Gaskell's showcasing of Margaret early in the novel prepares her for other occasions in which she will overturn the status quo and find herself as the object of observation.

Margaret's own experience of being Edith's poorer relation gives her insight into what it is like to occupy a lower position in the social hierarchy. More importantly, perhaps, gender places Margaret and other women of her class in a position that allows them to witness honest attitudes and unmasked behaviors in the poor working class that exclude men in positions of authority. The middle class woman's position in society affords her an advantage that men of her class cannot have. In "Discovering Autonomy and Authenticity in *North and South,"* Valerie Wainwright suggests that the novel shows how Margaret develops a greater sense of her own

position in society once she gets to know the workers as individuals: “Gaskell is concerned with a general view of the human condition which extends itself beyond the immediate search for remedies for social ills and proposes a radical rethinking of the relations between self and society” (150). Upon her return to Helstone and in her later move to Milton, Margaret discovers that there are some occasions in which she feels obliged to speak her mind. Upon returning home, she inhabits the conventional position of a middle class female who possesses a modicum of authority when it comes to managing servants and of a woman of the Victorian era who should remain subject to the authority of dominant male figures in her life. Shortly after, her father abandons the vicarage in Helstone and decides to move the family to the industrial Milton-Northern. As Margaret deals with one of the family servants, she gets a taste of what it is like to hold authority and have a member of the lower class challenge her. The servant, Dixon, has become so comfortable in her position as lady’s maid that she speaks out of turn regarding her opinion of the family’s move: “And master thinking of turning Dissenter at his time of life, . . . ! as I said to missus, ‘What would poor Sir John have said? He never liked your marrying Mr. Hale, but if he could have known it would have come to this, he would have sworn worse oaths than ever, it that was possible!’” (45). Margaret’s shock at Dixon’s impertinence reveals itself at first by her thinking, “To hear her father talked of in this way by a servant to her face!” (45), and then by her admonishment of Dixon, “Dixon! You forget to whom you are speaking” (46). Margaret’s experience here gives her insight into both ends of the social ladder, an insight that will serve her well when she mediates between Thornton and his workers.

Gaskell astutely compares Margaret to an authoritarian male as Dixon realizes she has overstepped and “henceforth obeyed and admired Margaret” (46), not because Margaret displays her assertiveness as a woman, but because she reminded Dixon of Reverend Hale: “Miss

Margaret has a touch of the old gentleman about her. . . .” (46). Clearly Margaret can function within the social hierarchy in a conventional way, but the incident with Dixon illustrates a more unconventional strong will in her nature that she will need when she moves to the industrial town of Milton-North.

In Milton, as Margaret spends her days doing charitable works that society condones or shopping in public marketplaces, she observes the plight of working class individuals and develops empathic feelings that create an undercurrent of kinship. Bakhtin describes the dynamic that occurs in the marketplace: “[I]n the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age” (10). He further states that the setting allows “a ‘turnabout,’ (11) in which “people were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations” (10). Although the working class acknowledges the higher social position of middle to upper class women, they do not see them as threats because the women’s level of power corresponds to their own; therefore, they feel more at ease to speak their minds and perform in ways that show their discontent. Additionally, the marketplace is a space of commerce that equalizes the participants. Everyone is there either to buy or sell, so hierarchy depends not so much on class as it does on possession of money to spend.

Gaskell’s description of Margaret’s marketplace experience patently parallels Bakhtin’s analysis: “It was something of a trial to Margaret to go out by herself in this busy bustling place” (65). It is in this setting that she first discovers a kind of kinship with the working class, although her sense of decorum flinches at their boisterous nature:

> The tones of their unrestrained voices, and their carelessness of all common rules of street politeness, frightened Margaret a little at first. The girls, with

> their rough, but not unfriendly freedom, would comment on her dress, ... There was such a simple reliance on her womanly sympathy with their love of dress, and on her kindliness, that she gladly replied to these inquiries, as soon as she understood them; and half smiled back at their remarks. (66)

The factory men's forward remarks, not about her clothing but about "her looks," brought from her a "flash of indignation" (66), but later she admits to herself, "Yet, there were other sayings of theirs, which, when she reached the quiet safety of home, amused her even while they irritated her" (66). Perhaps Margaret appreciates the factory workers' freedom to speak their minds, but surely she learns that their words hold no physical danger for her:

> This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. (Bakhtin 10)

Therefore, Margaret's venture into the marketplace actuates her ability to understand and communicate with the working class in ways that her male counterparts cannot.

Ann Longmuir emphasizes the implications of Margaret's marketplace experience in "Consuming Subjects: Women and the Market in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*":

> On the one hand, Margaret clearly understands her own engagement with public life in Milton-North as an extension of the philanthropic work she carried out in her home village of Helstone. On the other, Gaskell's novel repeatedly suggests that Margaret's participation in the public sphere as a consumer has a more

> significant impact on the lives of the poor than her philanthropic work. Not only does it inadvertently associate her with the exploitative practices of factory production, but Margaret's somewhat unconscious deployment of the representational value of commodities also signals her participation in the maintenance of industrial Britain's class system. But perhaps most importantly, Margaret's consumer activity not only renders her complicit with a system that is inimical to her, it also endangers her person, as she risks becoming commodity herself. In other words, Margaret's consumer activity threatens to align her not with the philanthropist-turned-shopper, but with the shopper-turned-prostitute. (239)

Again Margaret gains a dual perspective of class as her shopping in the marketplace aligns her with consumers who rely on the factories' production of goods. While she may disapprove of the conditions in the factories, she also knows that the factory workers rely on consumers like her for their livelihood. The experience allows Margaret to view the issue in a more pragmatic manner. Additionally, participating in marketplace activities places Margaret shoulder-to-shoulder with the lower realm of society, and as Longmuir states, "endangers her person" and jeopardizes her reputation. The marketplace may consume her if she loses herself to that which Bakhtin refers to as the "material bodily principle": "The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed" (Bakhtin 19). In this setting of misrule, one may get caught up in the boisterous atmosphere of the setting. If one participates in such revelry, one may lose one's normal inhibitions and commit acts that are quite out of character. By placing herself in this topsy-turvy atmosphere, Margaret indeed takes a personal risk. However, she remains strong in

her convictions regarding her own behavior, and she grows as a person because she sees and hears enough from the impoverished workers to educate her even more about their difficulties.

She soon realizes the hardships the workers face and develops an interest in their troubles: "This man looked so care-worn that Margaret could not help giving him an answering smile, glad to think that her looks, such as they were, should have had the power to call up a pleasant thought" (67). At this moment, Margaret forms an unspoken bond with the workers wherein she begins to defend them and ultimately to speak out for their needs: "They had never exchanged a word; . . . ; yet somehow Margaret looked upon this man with more interest than upon any one else in Milton" (Gaskell 67). However, Margaret's strongest affiliation with the working class grows out of her relationship with the factory worker, Nicholas Higgins, and specifically his daughter Bessy, who suffers from byssinosis or brown lung disease, an illness she contracted while working in textile factories. Wainwright gives a perceptive analysis of this unlikely friendship:

> When Margaret Hale, new to the industrial town of Milton-Northern, voices her intention of visiting Higgins's home, Higgins is annoyed. To him, the proposal carries shades of authority's patronizing condescension, implicitly denying his rights to independence and equality. For Margaret, on the other hand, her interest is the outward expression of sympathy and fellow-feeling. It is paradoxically the attempt to put into practice her belief in the principle of "connection," in the "equality of friendship" that should unite the classes. (151)

Higgins first views Margaret's visit to their home as an intrusion by a condescending female who will speak of charity and good works while looking down her nose at them at the same time. Although the class distinction between Margaret and the Higgins family remains quite fixed, she

forms a bond with them that grows out of her disdain for manufacturing and the Higgins's dissatisfaction at the exploitation they experience firsthand. Nonetheless, the opinions of Margaret and Higgins, while similar in spirit, remain quite different in source. Margaret's initial opinion comes from a long-standing attitude of a social class that frowns upon tradesmen and sees their attempts to climb the social ladder as vulgar. Higgins's opinion arises from his own impoverished circumstance at the hands of the factory owners. The edification that Margaret receives from Higgins and Bessy will later provide the knowledge she needs to use her feminine influence as Mr. Thornton's love interest to convince him to listen to his workers.

Certainly the unlikely partnership of Margaret with the Higgins family represents an overturning of the traditional dynamic of the social hierarchy. A woman joins forces with the working class in order to raise awareness and push for reform. Wainwright sees Margaret's vision as that "of lives interwoven and interdependent. To a considerable degree her identity is constituted by the idea of belonging to a community, so much so that her sense of purpose in life, on which her happiness depends, is bound up with her ability to understand and share the interests, problems, and ethos of its inhabitants, first of the rural South and later of the industrial North" (153). The sharing of interests between middle-class women and the working class adds strength when they work together to achieve a turnabout of power. The alignment of a woman with members of the poor working class is, of course, not surprising. This position is not about class or caste; it is about the inferior position of one in a patriarchal society. Yet when the alignment of women and the working class results in a temporary gain of power strong enough to upset the male-dominated system of political economy, one can see the carnivalesque at work. Bakhtin's reference to French historian Jules Michelet may clarify such a vision: "Under each tiny leaf of this forest of dreams, the fruit which the future will harvest lies hidden" (qtd. in

Bakhtin 2). It is the unlikely rise of the presumed weak and lowly that turns society on its heels with such surprising impact that those who once looked down must now look up and see with a heightened awareness.

Of course, Margaret remains aware of the class difference between her and the Higgins family, but her conversations with Bessy evoke a kind of knowing and respect for the family that remains outside the vision of tradesmen like Thornton until Margaret teaches him. Margaret gains a deeper understanding from listening to Bessy, in her own dialect, state the sad truth about the inequities between classes: "Some's pre-elected to sumptuous feasts, and purple and fine linen, - may be yo're one on 'em. Others toil and moil all their lives long – . . . . But if yo' ask me to cool yo'r tongue wi' th' tip of my finger, I'll come across the great gulf to yo' just for th'thought o' what yo've been to me here" (137). Margaret's response verifies her opinion that charity is not enough to right the wrongs cast upon the poor workers: "It won't be division enough, in that awful day, that some of us have been beggars here, and some of us have been rich, ..." (137). Margaret, having come from a background that values formal education for men, recognizes a fact that the nouveau riche tradesmen class overlooks. Margaret's Christian upbringing has taught her that the wealthy have a responsibility to help those in need, just as Bessy knows that females of the higher class feel a duty to provide aid to the poor. However, hearing Bessy's poignant account of the predicament of the working poor indeed increases Margaret's vision and perspective, creating a metaphorical bridge across the "great gulf" of class difference. In addition, Bessy recognizes that Margaret genuinely cares about her wellbeing. Henceforth, Bessy and Margaret develop a rapport that transcends class and culminates in a true regard for each other. Margaret will no longer just reach down to help, but she will offer help in unconventional ways that destabilize social hierarchy.

When Higgins arrives and adds his pronouncement of the upcoming strike, Margaret's education at the feet of those socially below her becomes more profound. At this point, Margaret's knowledge of strikes is quite limited, but her knowledge of the parties on both sides is vast when compared to that of the players. In "The Languages of Industrialization," Hilary M. Schor emphasizes the importance of Margaret's edification when it comes to strikes: "Margaret must learn what the word *strike* means to a wide range of characters before she can mediate between them, and before they can learn to speak to each other" (Schor 560). All of the players in a strike, the owners and the strikers, have much to lose when the strike occurs. For the owner, there lies the threat of physical violence and destruction of property at the hands of an angry mob of workers, and for the strikers, there are the possibilities of a violent and organized defense and the ultimate loss of jobs. The hope for both sides resides in the hands of a mediator who knows both sides of the issue, and in Gaskell's story, the only possible mediator is Margaret. However, sometimes one does not learn the meaning of a word through language but through experience, which Margaret gains when the angry strikers storm the gates of the Thornton property: "As soon as they saw Mr. Thornton, they set up a yell, - to call it not human is nothing, - it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening" (161). Thornton's first reaction is simply to let them yell until the soldiers come "bring them to reason" (161). However, Margaret sees beyond their yelling and looks into the face of their fully human need. She then denies her own need for comfort and begs Thornton to comfort them instead: "Can you do nothing to soothe these poor creatures. It is awful to see them" (161). And finally, she rises to the top and takes control of the situation:

> Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to

> them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. . . . If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man. (161)

Instead of joining in the subversive actions of the workers, which would be highly inappropriate behavior for a woman of her status, Margaret turns to feminine wiles as she, not unlike Lady Macbeth's goading of her husband, prods Thornton to action by questioning his masculinity and courage. Thornton reacts predictably to her admonitions, considering he now has something to prove to a woman: "He turned and looked at her while she spoke. A dark cloud came over his face while he listened. He set his teeth as he heard her words. 'I will go'" (161)

Unlike Thornton, Margaret knows these people and feels sympathy for them that Thornton cannot understand. From her works with the disadvantaged and poor, she recognizes the face of hunger and poverty:

> Many in the crowd were mere boys; cruel and thoughtless, - cruel because they were thoughtless; some were men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey. She knew how it was; they were like Boucher, - with starving children at home – relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages, and enraged beyond measure at discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread. Margaret knew it all; she read it in Boucher's face, forlornly desperate and livid with rage. (161-62)

While Thornton only sees a battle, Margaret actually looks into the faces of these boys and men and sees the desperately hungry individual. Her vision is not just that of a charity worker; it is of a woman, a potential mother, who cries out for "sooth[ing] these poor creatures" (161). In addition, Margaret's dual societal position enables her to mediate between Thornton and the

strikers, and she scolds the strikers as she had done previously to Thornton: "For God's sake! do not damage your cause by this violence" (163). However, while her words apparently have no effect, when their uncontrolled violence harms Margaret, whom they know and respect, their tempers quickly cool: "They were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion. Those nearest the gate stole out ashamed; there was a movement through all the crowd – a retreating movement" (163). At this moment both Thornton and the strikers are immobilized, not by the anger of the strikers or by the might of Thornton's Irish soldiers, but by a woman who knows both sides of the argument and who can stand between them and give each a glimpse of the other side. Margaret's rise to the top in this scenario, albeit short-lived due to the limitations of her gender and her injury, places both the strikers and Thornton in the lower position where all they can do is look up to her and see their error.

The public spectacle of the strike can be deemed carnivalesque partially because Thornton's disempowerment is indeed temporary. Ultimately, the choice to call in soldiers to control the strikers and to fire the strikers and bring in outside workers belongs to Thornton. However, he temporarily relinquishes power, not because of the workers' demands, but because of Margaret's pressuring him to go and hear them. While he never allows the strikers to turn his world upside down, Margaret's words become the authoritarian voice. Stallybrass and White's analysis helps to clarify how the strike scene represents the carnivalesque:

> If we treat the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression we move beyond Bakhtin's troublesome *folkloric* approach to a political anthropology of *binary extremism* in class society. This transposition not only moves us beyond the rather unproductive debate over whether

> carnivals are politically progressive or conservative, it reveals that the underlying structural features of carnival operate far beyond the strict confines of popular festivity and are intrinsic to the dialectics of social classification as such. (26)

While Stallybrass and White note the temporary nature of hierarchical inversion and the preeminence of established authority, they also stress that much can be gained during even a brief period of reversal:

> Inversion addresses the social classification of values, distinctions and judgments which underpin practical reason and systematically inverts the relations of subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave. (56)

In the strike scene in *North and South* the hierarchic structure plainly becomes unstable as the power shifts between the strikers and Thornton, between Thornton and Margaret, and finally between Margaret and the strikers. Thornton, the strikers, and Margaret at first see the event from their own individual perspective. However, at the end of the day, Margaret and the strikers are looking through the same lens. Certainly the instability of the power dynamic is a temporary one, but however short-lived the episode, it initiates the change in Thornton's methods of dealing with his workers and gives him new respect for Margaret's insight. Wainwright's analysis of the scene of the riot emphasizes Margaret's ability to diffuse the volatile situation and to show Thornton a different perspective:

> Clearly, Thornton's personal intervention during the riot at his mill – his endeavor to defuse the violence – would seem to be dictated by Margaret's

> urgings. Both now and later, when she advises Higgins to speak directly to Thornton rather than his overseer, what is significant is that Margaret's interference makes Thornton aware that he has options and what these choices mean. (153)

In addition, Margaret's mediation opens the door for Higgins to communicate directly with Thornton, a dialogue that will bring about positive change at least in this work environment. This dialogue, not without distrust on both sides, provokes both men to take a chance on each other. Thornton gives Higgins the benefit of the doubt:

> For many months, the embarrassment caused by the strike had been an obstacle in Mr. Thornton's way; and often, when his eye fell on Higgins, he could have spoken angrily to him without any present cause, ... But when he became conscious of this sudden, quick resentment, he resolved to curb it. It would not satisfy him to avoid Higgins; he must convince himself that he was master over his own anger, by being particularly careful to allow Higgins access to him, whenever the strict rules of business, or Mr. Thornton's leisure permitted. (381)

Thornton has learned from Margaret's response to the strike that one must not be ruled by his baser inclinations. In this situation, he overturns his own powerful instinct for dogmatic authority in order to communicate with his worker. Thornton maintains his higher position, but, thanks to Margaret's intervention, he looks at Higgins with a new vision as they are both "two men . . . , living by the same trade, working in their different ways at the same object, [who now] could look upon each other's position and duties in so strangely different a way" (381). Higgins and Thornton begin, at this point, to share that which Stallybrass and White term a "classification of values" (56) because they are working together towards the same end. The carnivalesque or

overturning of hierarchy with Margaret at its hub clearly has worked in Gaskell's *North and South* to help its players see the world from the other side and act accordingly.

While Gaskell's *North and South* portrays the carnivalesque dynamic through the relationship of one female character with both the factory owner and the working poor, Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* brings two women to the forefront of the story, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. In *Shirley* the carnivalesque often manifests itself in a more metaphorical than direct fashion. In addition, there is the unusual circumstance in which Shirley, a woman, already possesses a large amount of power, a situation which in itself is topsy-turvy, yet she further overturns convention by acquiring the masculine title of "Captain," referring to herself as a man, and speaking her mind to one of the vicars. Also, Bronte does not place Caroline and Shirley in the direct line of fire of the worker uprisings, yet one can clearly note that both women indeed see the workers' motives. More important, however, is each woman's access to knowledge and their joint utilization of that knowledge to bring about change.

Bronte's characterization of the two women indicates that it may take two types of women to overturn male authority. Caroline represents the traditional Victorian woman whose conventionality and reserve temper her opinions and expression of feelings, while Shirley inhabits the upper or masculine realm due to her unconventional female role of wealthy mill owner with a boy's name (191) and a penchant for referring to herself as "Captain Keeldar" when she wants to stress her unconventional role: "[Y]ou must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman's affair – yours and mine entirely, Doctor (so she had dubbed the Rector)" (258). Ann Passel clarifies what she refers to as the "duplication" of these two women: "Each has qualities the other lacks: in one there is courage, independence, and pride; in the other, humility, sympathy, and selflessness" (326). Caroline laments the difference between them: "I

am poverty and incapacity; Shirley is wealth and power; and she is beauty too, and love – I cannot deny it" (246), not yet realizing that each woman brings out the strengths in the other. The idea of considering each character as the opposing representation of one woman is evocative indeed because it takes the sum total of all of these characteristics to reverse the patriarchal attitudes possessed by many of the male characters in the novel, especially Robert Moore. Shirley exerts influence because she holds the power of ownership, while Caroline's sway speaks more to Moore's romantic interest in listening to her. However, it takes the concerted efforts of both women to invert the hierarchy of power and ultimately to change Moore's stubborn opinion. Constance Harsh describes Shirley's influence as "the possibility . . . that women have the potential not only to survive in society but also to rule over it" (qtd. in McLaughlin 218). Apparently in Bronte's world, in order for women to achieve success in changing a male owner's attitude, they must be able to shift between playing conventional and unconventional roles.

The novel adds another topsy-turvy layer as Bronte also inverts the standard religious hierarchy by writing dialog that reveals the local curates as shallow fools rather than respectable resources for virtuous living. A key example occurs when Bronte sets the scene in which Shirley dismisses Curate Donne from her house because of his insulting and dismissive comments about the "poor" (272) people of Yorkshire: ". . . and as to the poor – just look at them when they come crowding about church-doors on the occasion of a marriage or a funeral, clattering in clogs; the men in their shirt-sleeves and wool-combers' aprons, the women in mob-caps and bed-gowns. They pos'tively deserve that one should turn a mad cow in amongst them to rout their rabble-ranks – he! he! What fun it would be!" (272-3). Shirley's reaction amazes her audience, not least of all, Curate Donne who cannot believe she would have the audacity to "turn out a clergyman" (273):

> Up she rose: nobody could control her now, for she was exasperated; straight she walked to her garden-gates, wide she flung them open.
>
> "Walk through," she said austerely, "and pretty quickly, and set foot on this pavement no more." (273)

When Donne questions her audacity, she responds, "Off! Were you an archbishop: you have proved yourself no gentleman, and must go. Quick!" (273). Donne's disbelief as well as the stunned silence of the other company adds a carnival mood to Shirley's performance as "Donne made his Exodus; the heiress sweeping him a deep curtsy as she closed the gates on him" (273). Shirley's curtsy dismisses Donne with an ironic act of deference that underscores her disdain for him, while the narrator's use of "Exodus" places Donne in the position of the beleaguered Jews and Shirley in the role of God. Shirley successfully forces Donne off of his snobbish high horse when she casts him out of her presence. Shirley's behavior represents a carnivalesque overturning of authority because even though she holds the powerful position of factory and property owner and hostess in this situation, she is still a woman, and the clergy, as representing the church, would hold the higher position. Yet, Shirley ignores his status when he fails to behave like a Christian.

Bronte believes that Christ's teachings run counter to the curates' support of mill owners, and thus she shows how they value money and power over love for their fellow human beings. Caroline and Shirley possess key roles in bringing about some resolution to these issues. In a world in which men are thought to be the keepers of leadership and wisdom, the rise of the influence of these women exemplifies a destabilization of long-held patriarchal beliefs regarding men's faith in their own indisputable sagacity. Bakhtin's reference to Rabelais' carnivalesque

images adds credence to the notion that Caroline and Shirley, while not officially or traditionally the voices of wisdom, possess an ability to see beyond traditional boundaries:

> Rabelais' images have a certain undestroyable nonofficial nature. No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook. (3)

Authoritarian males do not expect mere women to overturn prescribed roles in the way that Shirley gives Donne his comeuppance because men in their "pomposity" fail to realize the magnitude of female empathy. Certainly Shirley's wealthy and propertied position provides her with freedoms lacking in most females of her day, but even a wealthy woman's vehement taking-down of a clergyman in front of a roomful of guests represents a reversal of power.

Bronte portrays the curates' condescension and snobbery on more than one occasion, toppling their superiority by highlighting their foolish and self-serving natures. She depicts Miss Ainley, to whom Caroline and Shirley look to guide them on aiding the poor, as possessing a knowledge of the poor that surpasses all others, including the curates who claim to be experts in charitable works:

> She, who knew them all, had studied their wants, had again and again felt in what way they might best be succoured, could the means of succour only be found, was fully competent to the undertaking, and a meek exultation gladdened her kind heart as she felt herself able to answer clearly and promptly the eager questions put by the two young girls; as she showed them in her answers how much and what serviceable knowledge she had acquired of the condition of her fellow-

> creatures round her. (254)

Bronte inserts the narrator's opinion of Miss Ainley's superiority to the curates: "The very curates – who, in their trivial arrogance, were hardly worthy to tie her apron strings, or carry her cotton umbrella, or check woolen-shawl – she, in her pure, sincere enthusiasm, looked upon as sucking saints" (255). While Miss Ainley thinks of the curates as saints in training, the narrator clearly points out that an unassuming female who reaches out to the poor as one who can relate to a lower position in society, far outweighs offering help to the disadvantaged from a lofty position of church authority.

The church leaders join forces with the factory manager since members of both groups agree that the insurrection of Yorkshire workers must be squelched because not only the mill, but the whole community has much to lose financially if production is stopped. Anne Passel incisively describes the immense problem for the community as a whole: "The revolt of the workers against industrialization, the mill-owners' stubborn and often inhuman defense of their rights, the inciting-to-riot-and murder instigated by outside organizers – these have become the major problem of the whole community" (324). All of these events take place as "rectors and vicars line up in sympathy with mill-owners or with workers" (324). Much like Gaskell's Thornton, Moore, a relatively new resident of Yorkshire, lacks empathy for the plight of the mill workers:

> Not being a native, nor for any length of time a resident of the neighbourhood, he did not sufficiently care when the new inventions threw old work people out of employ. He never asked himself where those to whom he no longer paid weekly wages found daily bread; and in this negligence he only resembled thousands

> besides, on whom the starving poor of Yorkshire seemed to have a closer claim. (73-4)

In *North and South* Margaret is like Moore, new to the community; yet unlike him, she quickly sees the needs of the poor working class because she chooses to look. Likewise, Thornton, a long-time resident, cannot see the struggles of his workers to survive until Margaret enlightens him. Unlike these males, Shirley admits her ignorance, saying that she needs to place herself "under" Miss Ainsley's "tuition" (250) to learn how best to use her money to help the poor in her community, yet Shirley has seen enough of the struggles of the poor to know "The Briarfield poor are badly off; they must be helped" (252). Shirley asks for Caroline's advice because Caroline has knowledge that Shirley lacks, not only because of her familial relationship to a clergyman, but more importantly, because she has spent time with Miss Ainsley doing good works. Later in the conversation Shirley reveals a strategic quality generally reserved for men, when she admits that her motive for helping the poor is a proactive one, in order to avoid a violent uprising of the impoverished displaced mill workers:

> What I want to do is to *prevent* mischief. I cannot forget, either day or night, that these imbittered [sic] feelings of the poor against the rich have been generated in suffering: they would neither hate nor envy us if they did not deem us so much happier than themselves. To allay this suffering, and thereby lessen this hate, let me, out of my abundance, give abundantly; (253)

Unlike Shirley, Moore overlooks and underestimates the desperation of the displaced workers. His alliance lies only with his machines and his mill. In other words, his mill is the castle upon which his identity is built.

The workers' destruction of Moore's machinery represents a temporary overturning of bourgeois power, but according to Terry Eagleton, the Luddites hoped to press a permanent reform: "The Luddite rebellions were a calculated attempt to use attacks on machines to coerce employers into granting concessions in wages and working conditions" (qtd. in Hiltner 148). Moore gets a quick taste of this reversal of control when his machinery meets destruction before it ever gets to the mill. He hears the voice from one of the wagons, proclaiming victory: "Ay, ay, divil; all's raight! We've smashed 'em" (31). Now he knows the desperation of hitting bottom:

> Now Mr. Moore loved his machinery. He had risked the last of his capital on the purchase of these frames and shears which to-night had been expected. Speculations most important to his interests depended on the results to be wrought by them. (32)

Certainly, Moore fears "hitting bottom," but his humiliation is just as temporary as the workers' exultation while they are destroying the machines, bearing a similarity to the transient nature of inversion of authority. He feels a keen sense of shock at the downturn produced by the destruction of the frames:

> By the light of the lantern he held were his features visible, relaxing to a single smile – the smile the man of determined spirit wears when he reaches a juncture in his life where this determined spirit is to feel a demand on its strength, when the strain is to be made, and the faculty must bear or break. . . . He placed the lantern on the ground, and stood with his arms folded, gazing down and reflecting. (32)

Here, with his downward, reflective gaze, Moore suffers what Bakhtin refers to as degradation, meaning "coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives

birth at the same time" (Bakhtin 21). Bakhtin defines degradation as a phenomenon that will bring about change: "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better" (21). The paper left by the frame-breakers not only declares their present victorious rise to the top, but it also begins the process of Moore's realization that the status quo will no longer work:

> Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro' Moore, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children to go home to when they have done this deed. If you get new machines, or if you otherwise go on as you have done, you shall hear from us again. Beware! (32).

Bronte has again created a scene in which the lower realm inverts the power dynamic by bringing Moore down to a level where he must stop and reflect upon his error. Since his machines and factory represent his identity, when the machinery is destroyed, he has no choice but to rethink an identity that relies solely upon material things.

It is important to explore the opening of the story in order to illustrate the chaos that has descended upon the men in positions of power. The novel's protagonists do not appear until after Moore's machinery has met with destruction, a suggestion perhaps, that the female presence will ultimately restore order. Caroline's relationship and influence on Moore begin with her visits to the home of Moore and his sister, Hortense, Caroline's French language tutor. These early interactions, while not carnivalesque in nature, reveal Caroline's superior understanding of the desperation of displaced workers. However, she does not speak with the same assertiveness as does Margaret in *North and South*; she hesitates to argue with Moore because of her romantic interest in him. Also, when Caroline and Moore's conversation turns to the situation at the mill,

Caroline has an opinion but feels some discomfort in expressing it due to her belief that she is speaking out of place and upsetting Moore's masculine authority. She, nevertheless, attempts to remind Moore that there is more in society to consider than himself and his machines. She hesitantly criticizes his attitude toward the Yorkshire workers and intimates that he views his "living cloth-dressers" as of no more value than his machines (70). Moore admits that he feels alienated from the mill workers, whom he refers to as "these English clowns" (70), and has no wish to win their affection. After Moore's comments, Caroline "perceive[s] a screw to be loose somewhere, but that it was out of her reach to set it right" (70). She alone will not be able to set his faulty thinking right, but ultimately the combination of her gentle, unassuming nature with Shirley's assertive power can reverse his stubborn convictions.

Much of the topsy-turvy dynamic in Bronte's novel arises out of females knowing more than their male counterparts. For example, Shirley knows of Michael Hartley's reputed insanity and admonishes Moore's complacent attitude regarding the "mad Calvinist and Jacobin weaver" (224). She warns Moore, "Don't offer yourself as a target to Michael Hartley" (226). For patriarchal societies, knowledge, wisdom, and rational thinking belong to the masculine realm; however, in the example of Caroline and Shirley's knowledge of Hartley's irrational thinking versus Moore's negligence, the patriarchal rule becomes inverted. In *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature*, M. Keith Booker suggests "the carnivalesque represent[s] . . . different (potentially transgressive) reminders of the aspects of life that dominant culture systematically seeks to repress" (14). Moore's emphatic refusal to entertain female knowledge supports Booker's claim of repression. Moore, in his arrogant effort to maintain dominance of the situation, misses a chance to avoid the serious consequences of his actions.

Bronte's introduction of Shirley to the novel depicts a female with power, a voice that others hear. Like her male counterparts, she has much to lose at the hands of disgruntled workers. Her social class places her in alliance with the empowered men of the novel, and her gender gives her access to the workers that men of power can never have. She understands how to deal with the workers and communicates with them in a manner that shows her understanding of their position: "[C]lothier and mill-owner as I am, besides farmer, I cannot get out of my head a certain idea that we manufacturers and persons of business are sometimes a little – a *very little* selfish and short-sighted in our views, and rather *too* regardless of human suffering, rather heartless in our pursuit of gain" (311). Shirley has the distinct advantage of being able to inhabit both the masculine position of owner and the feminine position of observing and understanding human behavior: "I cannot forget, either day or night, that these imbittered [sic] feelings of the poor against the rich have been generated in suffering: they would neither hate nor envy us if they did not deem us so much happier than themselves" (253). As a factory owner, she wants to "*prevent* mischief" (253) that results from the suffering of the poor workers. She may not feel the same degree of pity for the workers as other women, but she does feel empathy for their situation. Rebecca McLaughlin states that "Shirley, as an independent, wealthy land and mill owner, does more than simply mingle with men in her business dealings; she is their superior" (217), a role reversal that garners both admiration and resentment. Mr. Helstone participates in Shirley's male roleplaying of Captain Keeldar when he requests that she spend the night of the raid on the mill with Caroline: "Exactly, captain: I thought the post would suit you. Will you favour Caroline so far as to be her guest for one night?" (315).

Like Gaskell's Margaret during the workers' strike, Shirley assumes responsibility for saving Moore and the mill: "What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here

inactive, I am glad to say, but of course to walk over to the Hollow" (320). *Duty* and *wisdom* certainly do not belong to the feminine realm when it comes to facing danger. However, Shirley realizes the importance of seeing if not participating when she tells Caroline that they must not sit down after hearing the explosions, but they must "see what transpires with [their] own eyes" (324). Shirley understands the importance of relying on her own vision of the raid instead of hearing it described from a masculine perspective.

At this point, Bronte inserts her female authorial voice in an effort perhaps to remind her readers of the struggle between classes:

> A yell followed this demonstration – a rioters' yell – a North-of-England – a Yorkshire – a West-Riding – a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears – perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the Hyena: Caste stands up, ireful, against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative Class. (325)

Bronte's language in this passage resonates the atmosphere of a world upside down. She parallels the rising up of the low and savage beasts with the uprising of the "famished and furious" (325) workers. One cannot help but recall Bakhtin's portrayal of living the spectacle: "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because it embraces all the people" (Bakhtin 7). Shirley and Caroline's experience of the raid is an elemental one that calls to their senses. They witness "the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the

loudest rattle that had yet been heard, . . . : they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the first time paramount above the rational human being" (326). The women can only stare unmoved, their vision transfixed as "they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene – from the mass of cloud, of smoke – the musket-lightening – for the world" (326). Caroline and Shirley's witnessing of the raid makes them participants in the carnivalesque spectacle because they take on the intense feelings of the fighting crowd.

Instead of shrinking into the background after witnessing such a horrible spectacle, Shirley emerges with new determination and reasserts her dominant role. She claims men's ignorance when it comes to the true nature of women:

> If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. . . . If I spoke all I think on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in a half an hour. (333)

Here Shirley realizes her connection with the workers. It is indeed deadly to rise up against a will that has held power for so long. However, she knows that "women read men more truly than men read women," and she also knows that to say so publicly would be "declined with thanks" (333). Therefore, she chooses to exert her influence privately rather than publicly.

Shirley addresses the workers in a confident voice that maintains her authority but also lets them know she understands their situation. When they tell her they have been talking over

the battle, she rejoins, "What good does your talking do?" (336). Bakhtin posits that "[t]he passing from excessive praise to excessive invective" (164) is characteristic of the carnivalesque language of the marketplace. He adds that this kind of talk carries a familiarity that is both "affectionate and complimentary" (165). Shirley knows how to use this type of language to gain the respectful ear of the working class:

> There is nothing the lower orders like better than a downright good-humoured rating. Flattery they scorn very much: honest abuse they enjoy. They call it speaking plainly, and take a sincere delight in being the objects thereof. The homely harshness of Miss Keeldar's salutation won her the ear of the whole throng in a second. (336)

The workers listen to Shirley because she understands the type of communication to which they respond. Her familiarity to their circumstances can only be credited to an insight she has gained through observation of the workers' habits and empathy for their situation: "She bade them good-morning with a certain frank, tranquil ease . . ." (336). At one moment she admonishes them for being "gossip-loving" and "trifling their time away," and in the next, she smiles at them in a way that "half-belie[s] the severity of her speech" and courteously requests that they "oblige [her] by taking their cans and going home" (336). In a matter of minutes the workers had cleared the lot. Shirley thanks them and addresses them as "friends" (337). Clearly she has spent time learning to know the workers as evidenced by her shrewd and successful interaction with them.

Shirley embodies the carnivalesque because she exploits the duality of her role in a way that suggests that she understands that power lies in assuming roles that keep those who think they are in power off balance. The fact that she refers to herself on occasion as "Captain Keeldar" attests to her understanding of the hierarchic dynamic. She moves easily from the role

of mill owner when she berates the workers for talking, to the ignorant female who pretends to know nothing of the attack on her mill. Shirley does not literally wear a mask, but she knows that in order to invert the hierarchy of power, she must assume different roles. Helene Moglen asserts the value of Shirley's role-playing skill when it comes to dealing with men:

> Shirley sees men too clearly to allow them to feel comfortable with her. Her queer, significant smile reveals that she is not endowed with the "soft blindness" that is endearing in a woman. But she knows that if there is a purpose to be achieved, she can accomplish it only by playing the coquette: manipulating the men she needs so that they think they are manipulating her. (Moglen 164)

In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin speaks of the "social transformation" (81) that occurs in the carnivalesque: "the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presented this essential relationship to time and to social and historical transformation" (81). Shirley's role-playing represents that which Bakhtin refers to as travesty or "renewal of clothes and of the social image" (81). While Shirley does not don different clothing, she easily takes on different social images in order to overturn "hierarchic levels" (81), "another essential element" of the carnivalesque (81). She can move from high to low with finesse that serves her well in all of her social dealings.

Indeed Shirley has the advantage of financial power, but the limitations defined by her gender prove to be her greatest challenge to overturn. As always in the carnivalesque, the low only gets to be on top temporarily, and the limitations defined by her gender will always regain the upper hand. Therefore, Shirley learns a painful lesson when Moore tarnishes that which she had believed to be a friendship between the two. For Shirley, Moore sees her as an object instead of an individual when he diminishes their relationship by proposing to her: "Shirley's position

does not isolate her less than other women in her relationships with men. Her wealth and status don't make her their equal. They make her more valuable; a prize worth winning: a trophy worth exhibiting" (Moglen164). Her superior financial position does not make her Moore's equal, but it does make her someone he wishes to marry. However, she does not respond to his proposal in the conventional female fashion of her day as Moore describes to Yorke:

> It vexed me; it kindled my ire, to find that she neither blushed, trembled, nor looked down. . . . Instead of faltering a sweet Yes, or maintaining a soft, confused silence (which would have been as good) she started up, walked twice fast through the room in the way that *she* only does, and not other women, and ejaculated, - "God bless me!" (500)

Her outrageous response reveals her disappointment that one whom she considered her friend could have such a low opinion of her: "You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse, rather than like a lover who asked my heart" (500). She continues to tell Moore of her true regard for him: "I *did* respect – I *did* admire – I *did* like you, ... : yes – as much as if you were my brother: and *you – you* want to make a speculation of me. You would immolate me to that mill – your Moloch!" (501). Moore's description of Shirley at this point in the conversation clearly indicates a reversal of hierarchy: "By the Lord! Yorke – she rose – she grew tall – she expanded and refined almost to flame: there was a trembling all through her, as in a live coal, when its vivid vermilion is hottest" (502). Shirley's reaction to Moore's mercenary proposal opens his eyes to his error in ways that neither the violence of the mill workers nor Caroline's soft admonitions could:

> I'll do it no more, never more will I mention marriage to a woman, unless

> I feel love. Henceforth, Credit and Commerce may take care of themselves. Bankruptcy may come when it lists. I have done with slavish fear of disaster. . . . No woman shall ever again look at me as Miss Keeldar looked – ever again feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt: in no woman's presence will I ever again stand at once such a fool and such a knave – such a brute and such a puppy. (503-4)

The change in Moore does not come because he has been lowered; it comes because he has been lowered in the eyes of a woman.

Contrary to traditional portrayals, the strong bond of feminine friendship between Caroline and Shirley does not succumb to Moore's interest in Shirley. Instead it gains strength because each woman understands her position and is comfortable with the person she is:

> It is, of course, the intelligence and decency of Caroline and Shirley, their mutual awareness and shared concerns, which make their friendship possible. It is also because Shirley's position, inhabited with full confidence, is supported by Caroline's deference, that their friendship can thrive. While both girls feel comfortable occupying the relative positions with which they are familiar, the absence of strain within the acknowledged hierarchy derives from the fact that, on another level, both are as women, outsiders and equals. (Moglen 165)

The alliance between Caroline and Shirley originates from their shared status as women but extends further to their ability to work together toward a common goal, to improve conditions in their community. Their connection as women coincides with the connection they feel towards others who are deemed outsiders, the workers. Thus, they possess vision and are privy to knowledge that their male counterparts cannot access without their help.

Because of the influence of these two very different women, Moore begins to look at the plight of the poor with a new vision – a vision that passes to him from the eyes of Caroline and Shirley. Like Gaskell's Thornton, because of the influence of feminine vision, voice, and knowledge, he develops a changed attitude towards the working class that will serve him well. He confides his changed vision to Yorke:

> Something there is to look to, Yorke, beyond a man's personal interest: beyond the advancement of well-laid schemes; beyond even the discharge of dishonouring debts. To respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more fore-bearing to suffering, than I have hitherto been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust. (508)

Moore learns the lesson of empathy and how to treat his fellow man with justice from the tutelage of two women: one, quiet and unassuming, and the other, a captain.

In these two industrial novels three women in their own way exemplify the role of the middle-class woman in nineteenth century England. Each of these women possesses a keen awareness of woman's place in her society. However, they also each are in a position to see the conflict that arises between the working class and the bourgeoisie in their respective communities. Their vision allows them a perspective that gives them a voice to speak out in defense of the workers' struggle and to suggest approaches to alleviate the conflict in ways that benefit both sides. They recognize that the class constraints that work to keep the workers down are not so different from the societal constraints that work to keep women down. When their male counterparts realize the knowledge behind women's advice and begin to see as well, they learn that compromising with the workers garners positive results, and they also learn that

women have more to offer society than ornamentation and domestic accomplishments. Herein lies the seed for social change. All of this progress in these novels, however, occurs with the carnivalesque at its core. Each novel displays numerous accounts of Bakhtin's theory:

> All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out," of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, profanations, comic crownings, and uncrownings. (11)

All of the shifts in power and "turnabouts" in these novels render an important result that is essential in the carnivalesque, and that result is renewal. For Bakhtin, one must suffer degradation in order to be reborn. One must know what it is like to be on the bottom in order to rejoice at moving to the top. Gaskell and Bronte give their reading audience characters who each in his or her own way experience this essential renewal and lay the groundwork for social change.

Chapter 4 – Women, Agency, and Transformation in the Turn-of-the-Century Novel: Women's Carnivalesque Power in Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End*

Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End,* transitional novels that connect the Victorian Period to Modernism, represent the culmination of this study. Both novels highlight the experiences, attitudes, and challenges of sisters who at certain points in their lives must develop self-reliance, and ultimately prove themselves quite capable. For three of these females, Sophia Baines, Margaret Schlegel, and Helen Schlegel, their most difficult challenges occur when they become involved with men. At first they assume the compliant nature of many of their female predecessors, but their resourcefulness and individualism prevail in the end. The root source of their individualism and resourcefulness can be found in carnivalesque scenes.

The representations of the carnivalesque in these novels as opposed to those in previous chapters have transformed with time's passage. Women, while still subject to the old conventions and inequities, have more choices and an increased sense of agency. *The Old Wives' Tale,* published in 1908 and *Howards End,* published in 1910, both show a change in how their authors depict women, especially when considered in comparison to the novels of Hardy, Gaskell, and Bronte. Females now assert their views with more confidence and less fear of society's judgment. They also prove that a woman can survive without male protection and supervision. At the end of both novels, the female characters have come to rely, not on men for companionship and support, but on other women. For example, when Sophia's husband abandons her in Paris, she does not succumb to the loss; nor does she go in search of a male protector. She finds a way to be self-sufficient. Likewise, when Helen gets pregnant out of wedlock, she does not face personal ruin; instead she and her sister choose to raise her son at

Howards End, and the novel ends with a bright look toward the future. These depictions reveal that progress has indeed occurred since the days of Eustacia, Sue, Margaret Helstone, and even Shirley. Certainly financial independence plays an important role in these characters' self sufficiency, but in times past, a woman with money still aimed toward marriage. Even "Captain" Shirley ends the novel with marriage to the love of her life. Nonetheless, despite feminist progress, these post-1900 novels also include carnivalesque scenes that work to overturn hierarchy and undermine authority. These include spectacles like fairs and public executions as well as individual occurrences of misrule that render a world-upside-down. The characters experience life in a broader, more cosmopolitan way, thus expanding settings and ways in which "low troubles the high" (Stallybrass & White 3).

One character, Constance Baines of Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, imagines no other existence outside of her family's business and lives out her life as traditional daughter, wife, mother, and aged, concerned citizen of the provincial town of her birth. Even Constance chooses to step outside of her expected boundaries when she risks her life to cast her vote, hoping to save her town from absorption into urban sprawl. Certainly, all four of these women confront an England that is changing and moving toward modernity. This transitional status influences each of their lives and outcomes, and their relationship to the carnivalesque therefore presents itself in a different way.

By the time Bennett and Forster's novels were published, the status of women had changed as evidenced in publications directed towards the female audience. Bennett became editor of *Woman* in 1896 (De Stasio 40) and "set out to improve the standard of the paper, meeting the proprietors' request for 'certain modifications in the existing policy'" (De Stasio 40). The magazine included "fewer purely domestic pieces and more short fiction" (De Stasio 40). De

Stasio further claims, “Bennett adopted a mildly feminist outlook so that the new opportunities for education and work for women were mentioned side by side with the traditional domestic activities such as dressing, cooking, etc.” (42). One can see that publishers of periodicals for women were cognizant of the transitional nature of the time and made sure to include both conventional and modern elements.

Constance and Sophia Baines, along with Forster’s Schlegel sisters, gain greater insight into themselves as well as others and work to overcome their difficulties instead of collapsing under the weight of them. Many of the scenes in which they do so represent a literal or metaphorical topsy-turvy dynamic. *The Old Wives’ Tale* and *Howards End* show how women can undermine male authority and attain independence and autonomy instead of personal ruin or marriage, thus verifying that the carnivalesque, as in days of old, works to bring about renewal and metamorphosis.

Elements that characterize a carnival atmosphere weave through both novels as harbingers of change, while inversions of hierarchy and spectacles of unconventional behavior repeatedly occur as indicators of instability and disquiet. *The Old Wives’ Tale* gives literal examples of carnival through its portrayal of Wombwell’s Menagerie and a public execution, while *Howards End* provides predominantly symbolic carnivalesque scenes of gender and class transgression such as Margaret Schlegel jumping out of a moving car and Helen Schlegel and the Basts crashing Evie Wilcox’s wedding. However, it is important to note at this point that the carnivalesque as a transferal of low to high manifests itself quite differently in sections of *Howards End*. Instead of the upper realm of society always experiencing a turnabout at the hands of the lower realm, on occasion, some members of the Wilcox family lack ideals and turn toward materialism, creating situations in which members of the upper class bring *themselves* low in the

sight of others. Early in the novel Charles Wilcox offers Mrs. Munt a ride to Howards End in his motorcar. Obviously he feels little regard for the inconvenience and discomfort for Mrs. Munt as the speeding vehicle blows "dust into Mrs. Munt's eyes" (15). Forster also illustrates Charles's lack of care for the damage the car does to nearby plants and people:

> They drew up opposite a draper's. . . . he turned around in his seat, and contemplated the cloud of dust that they had raised in their passage through the village. It was settling again, but not all into the road from which he had taken it. Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers. (15)

Charles's solution to the problem of the dust reflects his prioritizing progress over all else: "I wonder when they'll learn wisdom and tar the roads" (15). This scene acts as a harbinger of the encroachment of modernism upon nature. Additionally, Charles exhibits arrogant contempt for the working class when he threatens the job of a porter who simply asks him to sign for a parcel: "Sign, must I? Why the—should I sign after all this bother? Not even got a pencil on you? Remember next time I report you to the station-master. My time's of value, though yours mayn't be" (14). Charles's own behavior lowers him to the level of a self-absorbed snob.

However, Mrs. Munt proves quite the match for Charles in a volley of words. She intends to defend her niece's honor and bristles at the condescending way in which Charles addresses her as if she were one far below his status: "But she did not like his voice. He sounded as if he was talking to a porter . . ." (16). When he asserts that there is no possible way that Helen would be a suitable match for Paul, Mrs. Munt loses her temper: "If I were a man, Mr. Wilcox, for that last remark I'd box your ears. You're not fit to clean my niece's boots, to sit in the same room with

her," (17-18). The entire journey reflects a world-upside-down as the young man and older woman heatedly argue while the two ride in the rocking and bouncing "great car" (14).

This scene alone reveals how times have changed for women since the days of Hardy's Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead. Bennett and Forster's women either have or attain some degree of autonomy; however, like their Victorian predecessors, they do make choices about men that sometimes result in unpleasant, if not always harsh, consequences. Conversely, Sophia Baines and Helen Schlegel's punishment for transgression appears mild when compared to the tragic outcomes of Eustacia and Sue. The difference in outcomes also marks a change in social attitudes indicative of the different time periods in which the novels are set. For example, the predominantly rural society of Hardy's novels holds little tolerance for women who overstep boundaries of female decorum. Indeed, both Eustacia and Sue participate in carnivalesque scenes or actions, but their personal consequences for doing so are destructive – death and a broken spirit. Rather than endorse these consequences, though, Hardy uses the downfall of these strong and admirable women to emphasize why change needs to happen. Gaskell and Bronte's novels of the industrial period align women with the working class, and their experience of hierarchical inversion emerges through their observation of subversive behaviors in others, their advocacy for the impoverished working class, and in Shirley's case, speaking her mind in an authoritative voice suggestive of a male subject. Instead of punishment for their behavior, they each have a happy ending. Showing further progress, women in Bennett and Forster's novels actually develop powerful personal relationships with working class men who are tradesmen in commercial settings, thus clouding class boundaries in ways that trouble past conventions. Certainly they face consequences for their misdeeds, but in the end they prevail without a strong

male presence. The vision of change here lies in women helping and sustaining each other, a transformation that upsets the old problematic notion of redundant women.

In Bennett's novel carnival appears traditionally as fairs, festivals, and menageries, and these events introduce "a certain cosmopolitanism, arousing desires and excitements for exotic and strange commodities. . . .The fair "turned the world inside out' in its mercantilist aspect just as much, if not more, than it 'turned the world upside down' in its popular rituals'" (Stallybrass & White 37). One need only look to the example of Wombwell's Menagerie in *The Old Wives' Tale.* The celebration of the Bursley Wakes assumes full Rabelaisian glory when Wombwell's elephant chooses its own moment to rebel:

> [O]ne of the three Wombwell elephants had suddenly knelt on a man in the tent; he had then walked out of the tent and picked up another man at haphazard from the crowd . . . . Being stopped by his Indian attendant with a pitchfork, he placed the man on the ground and stuck his tusk through an artery of the victim's arm. (103).

The spectacle of the elephant brings the high and low residents of Bursley and surrounding areas into the same physical space. Generally people of the Five Towns' higher ranks of society would avoid such a rowdy event, refusing to brush shoulders with the commoners: "It was a glorious spectacle, but not a spectacle for the leading families" (67). Therefore, at first "[t]he Baineses ignored the Wakes in every possible way," (67), but the corpse of the elephant-gone-mad was a sight no one wanted to miss:

> It was the morning of the third day of Bursley Wakes; not the modern finicking and respectable, but an orgiastic carnival, gross in all its manifestations of joy. The whole centre of the town was given over to the furious pleasures of the

> people. Most of the square was occupied by Wombwell's Menagerie, in a vast oblong tent, whose raging beasts roared and growled day and night. . . . All the public houses were crammed, and frenzied jolly drunkards, men and women, lounged along the pavements everywhere, their shouts vying with the trumpets, horns, and drums of the booths, and the shrieking, rattling toys that the children carried. (102)

Bennett's depiction of the revelry surrounding the carnival atmosphere echoes Bakhtin:

> The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. . . .all were considered equal during carnival. Here in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. (Bakhtin 10)

It was the display that created, in the words of Terry Castle, "a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies" (6). There was "[n]o social exclusiveness [that] could withstand the seduction of that dead elephant" (104).

The elephant had obviously had enough of the demands of his caretakers and therefore, decided to reverse the chain of command and place his trainers beneath him, literally. This rebellion rendered the elephant victorious for a brief period, but ultimately ended with his degradation and execution: "His head was white-washed, and six men of the Rifle Corps were engaged to shoot at him at a distance of five yards, while constables kept the crowd off with truncheons" (103). After this fantastic execution, Mrs. Baines and Constance, despite their previous snubbing of the event, cannot resist the opportunity to view the corpse of the Wombwell elephant.

Just as the elephant represents exoticism and change in *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Howards End* also includes its own depictions of otherness; for example, the Schlegels' German heritage and the Wilcox's fascination with the motorcar. Margaret overturns the power of Charles and his "great car" when she "jump[s] straight out of the car" (152) because he refuses to go back and see about a cat he had run over. Instead of suffering for her misdeed like Hardy's Eustacia or Sue did, Margaret emerges from the scene having undercut Charles's authority and having overturned the power of the figuratively masculine automobile by scaling its boundaries. In addition, she gains a new and much lower opinion of men of Charles Wilcox's ilk: "They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust, and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they" (153). Charles acquires a fearful respect for Margaret after the incident: "It was a woman in revolt who was hobbling away from him . . ." (152). His vision of Margaret's empowered act brings about his realization of the threat that Margaret's power represents and of his own inadequacy: "Charles was depressed. That woman had a tongue. . . . He lacked his father's ability in business, and so had an ever higher regard for money;" (154). This incident represents the beginning of Charles's realization that transformation in the way he had always expected his life to be is imminent.

Certainly the carnivalesque in both Bennett and Forster's novels plays an important part in depictions of unconventional feminine behavior, but it presents itself in ways that speak to the societal changes that are under way in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century England. Constance and Sophia's, and Margaret and Helen's stories represent a bridge between the Victorian and Modern periods, a time period in which the old conventions are still present, but new codes of behavior are beginning to emerge. These female characters occupy a confusing and unstable transitional space for their gender, culture, class, and in their physical relationships that

provokes them to try to find a balance. Sophia and Helen push the boundaries of female decorum and suffer for their mistakes, but they survive bad experiences, and one may argue that they are better and stronger for it. Elements of carnival frame their stories, providing situations that allow them to overturn traditional ideas of female behavior and masculine control. However, Constance and Margaret represent those women who still submit to patriarchal control on the surface, yet they both often think in subversive ways and occasionally transfer these thoughts into actions.

These two sets of sisters come from completely different backgrounds. The Baines sisters are born into a middle-class family of drapers in the provincial Five-Towns' District community of Bursley. The Baines family occupies a position of status in their trade district; their business has been profitable and has afforded them a reasonably comfortable lifestyle, with a servant in residence. However, early in the novel the death of the bedridden family patriarch, John Baines, foreshadows change. On the other hand, the Schlegel sisters exemplify a cosmopolitan lifestyle, full of cultural activities, visits from their German relatives, and an inheritance that pays their way. Nonetheless, an important common thread lies in the progression from the old to the new as represented in the juxtaposition of the rural to the urban, the domestic to the international, human-powered transportation to the brash automobile, and propriety to impropriety. Another even more important similarity arises out of the representations of relationships between men and women, and it is predominantly surrounding these situations that one sees the world-upside-down emerge. Both novels depict a younger sister who becomes romantically entangled with a man beneath her class, and both love affairs fail, leaving the female to face the difficulties of her situation. These characters do not crumble under the weight of their mistakes; indeed they flourish and rise above the ruins.

Stallybrass and White describe Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* as "a realist and sympathetically accurate account of commercial working life in the industrial Midlands" (20). They posit that the capitalist society of the novel is no different than other "societies in locating its most powerful *symbolic* repertoires at borders, margins and edges" like the "Burslem Wakes, a hot-air balloon ascent and a public execution" (20-21). Constance takes a conventional path and feels content to spend her entire life assisting with Baines' drapery, while Sophia adopts a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Constance's difficulty in life arises primarily from her efforts to negotiate the transitional space she occupies – that confusing interval between the ways of the old generation and those of the new. She embraces change when she marries beneath her class and enthusiastically redesigns the drapery's price tickets. However, she cannot reconcile herself to the feisty attitudes of modern servants, and the threatened disappearance of Bursley to the Federation of the Five Towns' literally kills her. Sophia, on the other hand, craves change and elopes to France with a traveling salesman who abandons her, and she subsequently and successfully takes over the management of one boardinghouse, and using money that she has secretly withheld from her husband, she eventually becomes proprietress of a premier *pensione* in Paris. When she returns home, she and Constance mend their differences and sustain each other during their waning years. However, they both prove their ability to survive independently.

Bursley, encompassing the Baines' draper's shop, represents the center or main marketplace of the Five Towns' District. Therefore, Stallybrass and White's definition of the market as a setting for carnivalesque scenes proves particularly pertinent:

> At once a bounded enclosure and a site of open commerce, it is both the imagined centre of an urban community and its structural interconnection with the network of goods, commodities, markets, sites of commerce and

> places of production which sustain it. A marketplace is the epitome of local identity (often indeed it is what defined a place as more significant than surrounding communities) and the unsettling of that identity by the trade and traffic of goods from elsewhere. At the market centre of the polis we discover a commingling of categories usually kept separate and opposed: centre and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity, high and low. In the marketplace pure and simple categories of thought find themselves perplexed and one-sided. Only hybrid notions are appropriate to such a hybrid place. (27)

It is in such a hybrid place where one finds the intersection between the upper and lower classes, or in this instance, the owners and the workers. Not only is the draper's shop a place of business and commerce, but the Baines' family home resides in the same edifice. This type of space is that which combines home with business and also allows for the mixing and mingling of social classes, a space where representatives of the bourgeoisie like Sophia and Constance can come into contact with workers like Gerald Scales and Samuel Povey. The societal boundaries that have in times past separated these groups become blurred, enabling the formation of familiarity and relationships. An example of this blurring of boundaries occurs when Povey suffers a toothache, and Constance and Sophia take care of him. They overturn his masculine position of authority because his physical pain forces him to submit to two women who are below him because of their age and gender. However the hierarchical structure becomes unclear because they represent family members of his employer: "The situation was indubitably unexpected, unforeseen; it was too piquant, and what added to its piquancy was the fact that Constance and Sophia were, somehow, responsible for Mr. Povey" (59). Like Gaskell's Margaret Hale

ministering to Bessy Higgins, the Baines daughters undertake the care of one below them in status. However, even this relationship becomes unclear because of Constance's romantic interest in Povey, and later class boundaries again become distorted when Sophia develops her own romantic interest in Gerald Scales, a salesman, also of a lower class. Interestingly, both courtships begin in the shop rather than in the traditional parlor of the home, indicating a world inside-out.

The provincial town of Bursley not only turns out to be a scene for unsettling class relationships; it also has its own claim to exotic displays. It is certainly worth mentioning that the spectacle of exotic animals plays an important role in framing Bennett's narrative. The novel begins with the chaotic spectacle of an elephant's rebellion. Near the end of the story, upon Sophia's return to Bursley, she looks out the window of the train and spots "two camels and an elephant in a field close to the line, amid manufactories and warehouses and advertisements of soap" (500). Barnum's carnival creatures now occupy the same space as Midlands commerce, clearly representative of that which Stallybrass and White refer to as "a point of economic and cultural intersection, of hybridization" (38), a proximity that attests to change. Bennett utilizes the scene of the Wombwell elephant to signal a transformation for the Baines family, the Five-Towns' District, and England itself. The elephant's revolt coincides with the beginning of Sophia's mutinous romance with Gerald, and the presence of the Barnum Circus animals by the factory coincides with the now wealthy and cosmopolitan Sophia's return to Bursley.

Sophia overturns her family's code of behavior by running away to France with Gerald Scales, a transgression for which she suffers, not entirely unlike Hardy's females, excruciating distress, as depicted in her near-fatal illness following Gerald's abandoning her: "And then she was overwhelmed by the hopeless gravity of her state. She felt that her state was desperate. She

felt that she was dying" (379). Sophia "wanted to cut off her hair, and to send part of it to Constance and part of it to her mother" (379). Just as the elephant became a source of souvenirs for the citizenry of the Five Towns, perhaps Sophia, who now also feels like an outsider, plans to provide fragments of herself to her family:

> During the mid-nineteenth century hair work became a popular drawing-room occupation, as fashionable as the much-practiced knitting, netting, and crocheting. By acquiring knowledge of this art, ladies were able to manufacture the hair of beloved friends and relatives into bracelets, chains, rings, earrings, and thus insure that they could actually wear the treasured memento they prized. (*Victoriana*)

The elephant's rebellion against those who hamper his freedom parallels the beginning of Sophia's romance with Gerald. The Wakes was an annual event that in former days was "marked by the liberal exercise of sexual license and a spirited indulgence in blood sports – and dog- and cockfighting, pugilism, and bear- and bullbaiting" (Koenigsberger 139). However, "in the late nineteenth century, the fair and the novel channeled much of the excess that marked earlier forms into activities characterized especially by observation and spectatorship" (Koenigsberger 141). This spectacle plays an important part in foreshadowing a dismantling of the status quo.

At the same time that the carnival takes place, old and bedridden Mr. John Baines, left in the care of his daughter Sophia, chooses the time in which she leaves him to flirt with Gerald to "slid[e] partially out of the bed and [die] of asphyxia. After having been unceasingly watched for fourteen years, he had, with an invalid's natural perverseness, taken advantage of Sophia's brief dereliction to expire" (109). Clearly, Bennett juxtaposes Sophia's first great moment of rebellion

with her father's last patriarchal act. In addition, John Baines' death indicates a turning point not only in the lives of his family, but in England as well:

> They knew not that they were gazing at a vanished era. John Baines had belonged to the past, to the age when men really did think of their souls, when orators by phrases could move crowds to fury or to pity, when no one had learnt to hurry, when Demos was only turning in his sleep, when the sole beauty of life resided in its inflexible and slow dignity, when hell really had no bottom, and a gilt-clasped Bible really was the secret of England's greatness. Mid-Victorian England lay on that mahogany bed. Ideals had passed away with John Baines. (112)

The elephant's death, unlike that of John Baines, does not mean the end of something. Instead, it announces a new beginning, a change that cannot be ignored if one considers a symbolic alliance between three lower realms: the elephant, the Baines women, and the commoners. The carnival creates a setting that could

> unsettle "given" social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion and domination which structured the social ensemble. In the fair, the place of high and low, inside and outside, was never a simple given: the languages of decorum and enormity "peered into each other's faces". (qtd. in Stallybrass & White 43)

A blending of groups takes place as each group gazes upon the other even as they view the real spectacle:

> Yet this positioning of the subordinate classes as the object of the respectable gaze created the possibility of identification and even a sort of alliance between the "official" objects of display (the exotics from the colonies, the dwarf, the pig)

> and the “disobedient and rebellious subjects” who, the respectable claimed, used the fairs as “excuses for idleness and dissipation”. For the “disobedient” subject as much as the dwarf or the pig was one of the socially inferior groups whose low status was displayed and celebrated at the fair. If, contrary to Bakhtin’s view, there were critical divisions between spectator and spectacle, those divisions were constantly renegotiated and unstable, providing opportunity for symbolic acts of a self-consciously political kind. (Stallybrass & White 41)

The elephant’s mutiny also represents a shift in power as it symbolizes the growing dissatisfaction with British imperialism and its imminent demise. The whitewashing of the elephant’s head apparently serves as an attempt to cleanse and remove the color from the Indian beast that presumed to rise to the top. Koenigsberger describes the spectacle of the elephant as a precursor of change but also an indication of the overarching influence of imperialism on the British population:

> The Old Wives' Tale places the elephant at the center of its display as a mark of imperial alterity (though also preserving, as a palimpsest, the signs of "orgiastic frenzy" that mark was to have expunged). On the one hand, then, what still appears to the Baineses as a suspect, potentially riotous holiday is gradually rendered bourgeois and made tame by the commercial exhibitions and performances of Wombwell's Menagerie. On the other hand, the local wakes are deeply scored with the traces of imperialism, "savagery" in general and the elephant in particular. The presence of the elephant in Bursley situates the narrow provinciality of the Potteries, typically English, within the larger totality of British economic and cultural imperialism, and begins to consolidate by means of

> Wombwell's commercial omnipresence across England a sense of a shared British imperial culture. (Koenigsberger 143-44)

The draper's shop takes advantage of the commercialized spectacle of the elephant by changing its window displays to increase its sales, and the event also marks Sophia's broadened cultural experience.

Her father's death sends Sophia's life in an unexpected direction, but not the path she imagines when overwhelmed by guilt for her father's death. She experiences that which Bakhtin calls degradation: "coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. . . .Degradation digs a bodily grave for new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (Bakhtin 21). Mr. Baines' death announces multiple other changes: in time, "They knew that they were gazing at a vanished era" (112), in his business, in England, and in the lives of his wife and daughters.

The business changes as Constance joins forces with Samuel Povey to initiate a reshaping and rewording of item tickets, a change that "shocked" the "wholesale stationer" and embarrassed Mrs. Baines who thought that shop-tickets containing the word "Exquisite" would "bring ridicule to her shop" (120). The narrator uses the outrageous spectacle of the signs to signify Constance's own parting with the old ways of her parents and joining Samuel in a revolutionary way of conducting business:

> Those two, without knowing or guessing it, were making history – the history of commerce. They had no suspicion that they were the forces of the future insidiously at work to destroy what the forces of the past had created, but such was the case. They were conscious merely of a desire to do their duty in the shop and to the shop; probably it had not even occurred to them that this desire, which

> each simulated in the breast of the other, had assumed the dimensions of a passion. (119)

The transformation of the shop-tickets represents a victory for the valued store employee, Samuel, over the owner and "leading family" member, Mrs. Baines. Language is at the root of this renewal because it serves to destabilize the hierarchy of owner and employee. Simon Gunn explains how language confuses social hierarchy: "The absence of an explicit class-based language among the propertied is unsurprising, and serves as a warning against attaching excessive importance to a particular vocabulary in analysing social order" (17). Samuel's refusal to bend under "the crass Toryism of Mr. Chawner" or the "disdainful, inimical" attitude of Mrs. Baines gains commercial success that even the owner cannot deny (120). Fueled by his victory over his superiors, "every few days Mr. Povey thought of some new and wonderful word to put on a ticket" (121). This new era with its new language opens the door for increased undermining of old business practices, as seen later in the enormous sign that Samuel places on the storefront. The commercial setting of the draper's shop functions much like a fair by "promot[ing] a conjuncture of discourses and objects favorable to innovation" (Stallybrass & White 36). Samuel's innovations prove profitable to the business, and Mrs. Baines chooses increased profits over disapproving Samuel's new practices.

Revolutionary business practice, however, is not the only subversion of boundaries that Samuel commits. He also represents Constance's disregard for class boundaries when choosing a husband. She falls in love with Samuel, a man whom her mother feels is good enough to work in the shop but not good enough to marry Constance: "The fact was that he was not good enough. He was a solid mass of excellent qualities; but he lacked brilliance, importance, dignity" (162). The elder Mrs. Baines views Samuel as a "'comedown' for her daughter" (163). Constance also

notices Samuel's plebeian behaviors, but only once does she momentarily forget her position of dutiful wife and admonish Samuel: "Oh, Sam!" she exclaimed impulsively, "you surely aren't going to begin wearing those horrid paper collars again!" (177). Realizing that her comment suggests that she had always thought the collars "horrid," Constance feels "aghast at her own stupid clumsiness" and attempts to take back her words, "Just as you like, dear" (178). However, her statement struck home, and Samuel "went off gawkily with the collar and came back with a linen one" (178). This episode brings Constance to the surprising realization that she loves him "not for his good qualities, but for something boyish and naïve that there was about him" (178). Ironically, these qualities ignited her passion for him, even though "she knew that far down in her mother's heart was a suspicion that she had married ever so beneath her" (177). Constance, however, realizes that she admires him for the sum total of the person he is, that "she could not admire one part of him and frown upon another, thus proving that class difference, while maintaining its presence, can exist in a happy marriage. Constance's marriage to Samuel proves to be her most unconventional act, and the hybrid space of the draper's shop combined with the Baines' family home represents a ripe setting for her transgression.

According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque acts are temporary in duration, and Constance indeed returns to convention by henceforth biting her tongue when she disagrees with Samuel's personal and business practices, even when he begins smoking cigars and then places a huge, ostentatious sign on the store front:

> The signboard was thirty-five feet long and two feet in depth; over its centre was a semicircle about three feet in radius; this semicircle bore the legend judiciously disposed, "S. Povey. Late." All the signboard proper was devoted to the words, "John Baines" in gold letters a foot and a half high, on a green ground. (183)

The signboard, however, represents one marker of change that overturns the Baines's long-held way of conducting business. Constance keeps her opinion of the signboard to herself, yet she thinks, "dogs and cigars, disconcerting enough in their degree, were to the signboard, when the signboard at last came, as skim milk is to hot brandy. It was the signboard that, more startlingly than anything else, marked the dawn of a new era in St. Luke's Square" (183). After the incident with the paper collar, Constance refrains from outwardly criticizing Samuel, but her sympathy for their son Cyril after Samuel punished him for stealing money from the store's till, provokes private, insubordinate thoughts within her:

> Occasionally, when by herself, she would rebel for a brief moment, as one rebels in secret against a mummery which one is obliged to treat seriously. After all, she would whisper, suppose he *has* taken a few shillings out of the till! What then? What does it matter? But these moods of moral insurrection against society and Mr. Povey were very transitory (242)

Bennett's use of "mummery" confirms that Constance places Samuel's punishment of Cyril as not worth taking seriously, thus lowering her husband's authority, but only in her thoughts.

The notion of mummery leads to the idea of masquerade as a carnivalesque act: Terry Castle posits that the body in masquerade "transgresses its own limits" (76), thus overthrowing "the hierarchy of rank and class, destroying distinctions between masters and servants, consumers and producers" (77). While Samuel never puts on a false face, in order to hide his identity, Gerald Scales has no such compunction. Scales, the traveler who catches Sophia's eye, utilizes a symbolic version of a masquerade to maneuver his way into the Baines home. Bakhtin relates a mask to "transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries" (40), and Scales "scales" these boundaries by wearing a figurative mask. He dons the mask of a

"gentleman from Manchester" (129) who has been robbed and leads the Baines women and Mr. Povey to believe he holds a respectable position on the social ladder. Bakhtin refers to a mask such as that of Scales as one that "hide[s] something, keeps a secret, deceives" (40). Sophia initially views Scales' appearance on "her mother's doorstep in the middle of the snowy night" (128) as a miracle. She sees him as having the "air of the unreal and the incredible" (130), both of which he turns out to be, but not in the lofty manner of her vision. Scales' deliberate act of deceit of Sophia's family and his betrayal of his own impoverished class cast aspersions on others of his status when he wears the mask of victim:

> In the stress of hunger the lower classes were forgetting their manners – and this in spite of the altruistic and noble efforts of their social superiors to relieve the destitution due, of course, to short-sighted improvidence. When (the social superiors were asking in despair) will the lower classes learn to put by for a rainy day? (128-29)

Scales' false face obscures Sophia's vision so that she misses the signs of his dishonesty. Ironically, when she secretly meets Scales near the new railway, she believes the railroad workers or navvies to be far beneath them:

> The unspeakable doing of the navvies in the Five Towns had reached even her: how they drank and swore all day on Sundays, how their huts and houses were dens of the most appalling infamy, how they were the curse of a God-fearing and respectable district! She and Gerald Scales glanced down at these dangerous beasts of prey in their yellow corduroys and their open shirts revealing hairy chests. . . . They glanced down from the height of their nice decorum and felt the powerful attraction of similar superior manners. (147)

Sophia fails to see that Gerald's asking her to meet him without her mother's knowledge proves that he is not a gentleman. Instead, Sophia possesses no compassion for the impoverished and working class navvies. She sees them as a dangerous other and misses the fact that the true beast is keeping her company. The wayward behavior that Sophia can only imagine the navvies to have will become a reality in the form of Gerald's misdeeds. Gerald's family history, his sales experience, and his international travels have enabled him to observe multiple modes of behavior; thus, acquiring a mask comes easily to him. He easily hides the fact that he belongs to the lower class in order to "penetrate the inner sanctum" (Castle 28) of the Baines family. Castle explains how such masquerading has historically proven detrimental to the maintenance of social order:

> And herein lies a basic paradox of masquerade sociology: though on one level the masquerade advertised itself as a gathering of the upper classes, on another it was popularly recognized as the event, virtually unique among modern civil institutions, that did in fact "promiscuously" mingle the classes, bringing together men and women from all social ranks. (28)

Gerald uses his deceptive mask to breech the barriers of class that should protect Sophia from his kind, while she, so bent on escaping the confines of Bursley, remains blind to his true nature.

Gerald's mask begins to slip even before he and Sophia embark on their trip to France. Sophia, supposing that they will marry, steals money from her Aunt Harriet and runs away with Gerald. She begins to realize the enormity of her error when Gerald responds to her question about their marriage: "Oh," he said lightly and quickly, just as though she had reminded him of a detail that might have been forgotten, "I was just going to tell you. It can't be done here. There's been some change in the rules. I only found out for certain last night. But I've ascertained that

it'll be as simple as ABC before the English Consul at Paris; and as I've got the tickets for us to go over tonight, as we arranged . . ." (314-15). Gerald's nonchalant attitude regarding his supposed oversight begins Sophia's awareness of the social gulf that divides them: "her head was full of a blank astonishment at being mistaken for a simpleton! The sole explanation could be that Gerald, in some matters, must himself be a confiding simpleton" (315). Certainly at this point in the narrative, Sophia fears the abjection that accompanies social ruin, the "making a spectacle out of herself" that may result from her "inadvertency and loss of boundaries. . . . any *woman* could make a spectacle out of herself if she was not careful" (Russo 53). Similarly, Stallybrass and White submit, "carnival often violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger, social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong' – in a process of *displaced abjection*" (19). Gerald's figurative mask dismantles class boundaries and places Sophia's reputation in jeopardy. Like many other women of her day, Sophia failed to recognize "the classic device of a seducer" (315), and finds herself at the point of ruin: "The mere thought of the enormity did outrage to her moral susceptibilities. No, Gerald had most perfectly mistaken her for another sort of girl; as, for instance, a shop-assistant or a barmaid!" (319). However, Sophia's refusal to succumb completely by surrendering herself sexually to Gerald, gains her the upper hand in the relationship. In this contest of wills, Sophia emerges victorious, thus overturning the advantage held by Gerald because of his gender and his disguise.

Bennett strategically relocates the couple to France, which proves to be a space defined by its frequent carnivalesque scenes. Sophia's childlike appearance stands out in sharp contrast to the garish and bold faces of the French women with their "violently red lips, powdered cheeks, cold, hard eyes, self-possessed arrogant faces, and insolent bosoms" (327). Sophia initially feels frightened by "their unashamed posing, their calm acceptance of the public gaze" (327), behavior

reminiscent of Hardy's Arabella Donn. The appearance of women who proudly flaunt their "corruption" in the Restaurant Sylvain proves totally foreign to any vision one might witness in Bursley. However, the spectacles Sophia witnesses in France, instead of shocking her into submission as one might suspect the effect would be upon a sheltered woman from England, strengthen Sophia and provide her with useful insight into the ways of humanity.

Her final disillusionment with Gerald begins with the topsy-turvy atmosphere of a public execution. This event underscores the social divide between Sophia and her husband as she witnesses his exuberant participation in the "vulgar practices" of the "crude populace" (Stallybrass & White 9). Sophia begins to realize that people and activities that she finds beneath her status are perfectly acceptable to Scales:

> She remembered the dinner with horror. The long crowded table, with semi-circular ends, in the oppressive and reeking dining-room lighted by oil lamps! There must have been at least forty people at that table. Most of them ate disgustingly, as noisily as pigs, with the ends of the large coarse napkins tucked in at their necks. All the service was done by the fat woman whom she had seen at the window with Gerald, and a young girl whose demeanour was candidly brazen. Both these creatures were slatterns. (347)

Scales' fascination with the pageantry of the execution of Rivain disgusts Sophia, who assertively refuses to take part even though she is terrified to be left alone. Rivain's murder of prostitute Claudine creates a frenzy of excitement for the Parisian masses, and Scales doesn't want to miss out on the celebration that will follow the murderer's going under the guillotine's sharp blade. Sophia views the event as a "horrible" spectacle, while Scales counters that "[s]ome women enjoy themselves when they're terrified" (330). While Sophia sees such enthrallment

with violence as low-classed entertainment, Scales scoffs at her snobbery: "He pretended that such stories were the commonest things on earth, and that to be scandalized by them was infantile" (330). The difference in their attitudes emphasizes the immense social gulf that divides them. This incident again recalls the scene of the elephant's corpse in Bursley. Normally people of the Baines's status would ignore the spectacle of the Bursley Wakes "in every possible way" (103). However, the elephant's "dazzling social success" must be on the same level as Rivain's execution because like the Wombwell elephant, Rivain has risen to celebrity status. Yet, Sophia even surpasses her mother's snobbery because she will not allow herself to be drawn "into the vortex" (103). She submits to joining Gerald on the trip to Auxerre, an action arising from a sense of a wife's duty, but she draws the line at accompanying him to view the execution.

The events surrounding the execution work to remove every trace of Gerald's previous mask of propriety as his proclivity for associating with prostitutes and his foolish squandering of money move to the forefront. Sophia's eyes are opened, and she witnesses the tremendous social gap that separates her from her husband as her previous lofty vision of him hits bottom:

> The deep conviction henceforward formed a permanent part of her general consciousness that he was simply an irresponsible and thoughtless fool! He was without sense. Such was her brilliant and godlike husband, the man who had given her the right to call herself a married woman! (356-7)

With the unmasking of Gerald, Sophia feels no guilt about taking money from her passed-out husband's pocket and then sew[ing] the notes into the lining of her skirt. She had no silly, delicate notions about stealing" (357). Possession of money overturned the hierarchy of marriage and "gave her confidence, reassured her against the perils of the future, and endowed her with independence" (357). The revelation of Scales' true character anticipates his desertion of his wife

and Sophia's eventual rise to autonomy. Ironically, Gerald's participation in the scene of the execution does not give him even the temporary sense of power one gains when attending a carnival-like event. Instead, the execution overturns any hold he ever had over Sophia as she gains power when she recognizes his masquerade and undermines him by stealing from him. He may emerge penniless and destitute, but she possesses the ingenuity to ensure her own survival.

While Sophia's escape from Bursley was kept as quiet as possible, her imminent return thirty years later becomes quite the event in the town. Mr. Critchlow announces her return by quoting a passage in a column in *The Signal*:

> We understand that Mrs. Sophia Scales, proprietress of the famous Pension Frensham in the Rue Lord Byron is about to pay a visit to her native town, Bursley, after an absence of over thirty years. Mrs. Scales belonged to the well-known and highly respected family of Baines. She has recently disposed of the Pension Frensham to a limited company, and we are betraying no secret in stating that the price paid ran well into five figures. (491).

The newspaper's article marks yet another turnaround in convention. In years past, publicly announcing a woman's financial status would represent a great impropriety. However, Mr. Critchlow who had made so much of young Sophia's scandalous behavior is responsible for giving the story to the newspaper.

Sophia's return indeed draws attention in The Five Towns as she arrives with her poodle, Fossette in tow, and the dog's unusual appearance creates a stir: "The effect was to give to the inhabitants of the Five Towns the impression that the dog had forgotten an essential part of its attire and was outraging decency" (497). Constance worries about Sophia bringing "such a dog to a place where people were so particular as they are in the Five Towns" and further laments

how her sister failed to prepare her for "the spectacle of Fossette" (498). Constance's anxiety regarding Fossette reveals her own distrust of the cosmopolitan and even a sense of the imminent change that the intrusion of one so different represents. Ironically, Fossette, symbolic of diversity and change, remains the last one standing—albeit unsteadily—after both Sophia and Constance have died:

> She was hurt, and her appetite was hurt. However, after a few minutes, she began to reconsider the matter. She glanced at the soup-plate, and, on the chance that it might after all contain something worth inspection, she awkwardly balanced herself on her old legs and went to it again. (615)

Bennett returns, at the novel's end, to the portrayal of an exotic animal, but this time the "lowly" creature prevails. In this way, he most assuredly anticipates how diversity will flourish in England's future, thus overturning previous attempts to suppress it.

Forster's *Howards End* presents social hierarchy in a paradoxical way that in itself transforms carnivalesque representations. The novel predicts that with modernity and all of its trappings, the carnivalesque as reversal from lower class to higher class, is changing with the times. Instead, in this newly modern setting the shallow, materialistic behavior of the bourgeois Wilcox family often turns on itself by highlighting their shallow natures because of their preoccupation with property, motorcars, golfing, and global capitalism. The Schlegels' lives largely differ from that of the Baines sisters. Helen and Margaret Schlegel represent financially secure, upper class women who pride themselves on their progressive ideas regarding class and gender. They love to debate issues of social reform, attend cultural events, and they are quite adept at intellectual wordplay:

> In their own fashion they cared deeply about politics, though not as politicians

> would have us care; they desired that public life should mirror whatever is good in the life within. Temperance, tolerance, and sexual equality were intelligible cries to them. (Forster 25)

Women of their class have evolved to the point of assertively articulating their desires for change, but incorporating change into their lives is quite a different matter. For example, Helen's early romance with Paul Wilcox and her enthrallment with the Wilcox family pushed her convictions temporarily to the background:

> She had liked giving in to Mr. Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had liked being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was non-sense, Votes for women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. (21)

Certainly marrying into the self-assured Wilcox family would be an easier path for Helen; it would mean she would never have to grapple with her own ideals or ideas. Yet, when her romantic interest in Paul ends, she experiences a bitter disillusionment that solidifies her resolve against their kind: "When I saw all the others so placid, and Paul mad with terror in case I said the wrong thing, I felt for a moment that the whole Wilcox family was a fraud, just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs, and that if I fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness" (23). Helen views the Wilcoxes, with the exception of Mrs. Ruth Wilcox, as hiding behind the mask of property and possessions. They choose to look no deeper than the surface, thus "confirm[ing]" their "spiritual incapacity. Just as they cannot endure any deep emotion, so they cannot tolerate the unseen" (Thomson 178). Paul's "madness with terror" indicates a weakness in him that Helen had not seen before; he is terrified because Helen could tell his family about the error he committed by misleading Helen romantically. At this point,

Helen has the upper hand, and her opinion of the Wilcoxes as a whole becomes permanently diminished. Helen's experience with the Wilcoxes lays the groundwork for her future rebellion against their class, and she eventually indirectly overturns Mr. Henry Wilcox's authority and complacent attitude.

Forster presents England as undergoing a metamorphosis, and one way he depicts this notion is by juxtaposing Helen and Margaret's new ways of thinking with the romanticism and tradition of the past as represented by Mrs. Wilcox:

> She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her – that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. (Forster 19)

Ironically, Mrs. Wilcox dilutes the Wilcox and Schlegel panic over the engagement misunderstanding: "They do not love, any longer, if you prefer it put that way,' said Mrs. Wilcox, stooping down to smell a rose" (19). Mrs. Wilcox sees no need to quibble over fleeting human struggles; her allegiance belongs to things that last like Howards End.

The Schlegel women differ from their Victorian predecessors because social change for them represents more than charitable works and advocating for the working class. Instead they want to connect with and understand people like Leonard Bast. Until they meet him, Margaret and Helen spend more time talking about social reform with people of their own status than actually communicating with people of the working class. They come to admire him as a man of Nature when he tells them of his solitary wilderness walk in the darkness and his final emergence into the dawn:

> I managed one wood, and found a road the other side which went a good bit uphill. I rather fancy it was those North Downs, for the road went off into grass, and I got into another wood. That was awful, with gorse bushes. I did wish I'd never come, but suddenly it got light—just while I seemed going under one tree. . . .Looking back, it wasn't what you may call enjoyment. It was more a case of sticking to it. I did stick. I—I was determined. (117)

This solitary, brave act of determination raises Leonard's status in the Schlegels' view, and Helen enthusiastically expresses her admiration as she tells Leonard that he has "pushed back the boundaries" (118). Leonard experiences a brief moment of joy when considering the Schlegels' compliments: "Somehow the barriers of wealth had fallen, and there had been – he could not phrase it – a general assertion of the wonder of the world" (121). He treasures this meeting with Helen and Margaret and wishes to conserve it in what he thinks of as his "corner of romance" (119). Separating this romantic portion of life from the harsh realities of survival symbolizes a sacred space into which life's ugliness must not encroach:

> He did not want Romance to collide with the Porphyrion, still less with Jacky, and people with fuller, happier lives are slow to understand this. To the Schlegels . . . , he was an interesting creature, whom they wanted to see more. But they to him were denizens of Romance, who must keep to the corner he had assigned them, pictures that must not walk out of their frames. (120)

The Schlegels' overstepping the boundaries "of their frames," while their wish to help is genuine, fail to help him because they misunderstand Leonard's unsteady balance:

> [T]he boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it and at times people whom he knew had dropped in,

> and counted no more. He knew that he was poor, and would admit it: he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. (43)

Their misperception leads them to interfere in Leonard's working life, doing more damage than good, because they cannot see his vision of boundaries. Margaret sees value in helping him by intervening in his livelihood much like Margaret Hale initiates helping Nicholas Higgins' family. The difference, however, lies in the fact that for Margaret Hale, the line between her class and Nicholas's was clearly defined. Victorian England provided clear guidelines for acceptable behaviors of middle to upper class women.

For Margaret and Helen, who dwell in a time of transition, the boundary represents a blurry, even treacherous place. Michael Levenson asserts that by occupying this unwieldy space, "the Schlegels exemplify the predicament of the intellectual situated between the victims and beneficiaries of modern capitalism" (298). Their attempt to help Leonard by sending him a letter about his company's imminent demise and inviting him to tea "proved a conspicuous failure" (135). Their "prying into his work" (135) unbalances him, and he attempts to raise himself up by diverting their attention to the intellectual: "One can but see, as Ibsen says, 'things happen'" (137). Discussing business with them moved them out of "his romantic corner," and [h]e was itching to talk about books. . ." (137). The entire scene becomes a world upside down as Leonard grows angry at having his "brain picked" (139). Margaret's shock at her own misunderstanding of Leonard and the ensuing conversation accentuates the gulf between the Schlegels and Leonard, but even more, it underscores the foolish, superficial, character of Evie Wilcox as she witnesses the spectacle and laughs "as at a repartee" (139):

> "You are the man who tried to walk by the Pole Star."
>
> More laughter.

"You saw the sunrise."

Laughter.

"You tried to get away from the fogs that are stifling us all--away past books and houses to the truth. You were looking for a real home. "

"I fail to see the connection," said Leonard, hot with stupid anger.

"So do I." There was a pause. "You were that last Sunday--you are this today. Mr. Bast! I and my sister have talked you over. We wanted to help you; we also supposed you might help us. We did not have you here out of charity--which bores us--but because we hoped there would be a connection between last Sunday and other days. What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives? They have never entered into mine, but into yours, we thought--Haven't we all to struggle against life's daily greyness, against pettiness, against mechanical cheerfulness, against suspicion? I struggle by remembering my friends; others I have known by remembering some place--some beloved place or tree--we thought you one of these." (139-40)

Mr. Wilcox's subsequent attempt to warn the sisters about Leonard's "type" (144) doesn't garner the reaction from Margaret he expects and unsettles his complacency:

> I said before – he isn't a type. He cares about adventures rightly. He's certain that our smug existence isn't all. He's vulgar and hysterical and bookish, but I don't think that sums him up. There's manhood in him as well. Yes, that's what I'm trying to say. He's a real man. (144)

Here Mr. Wilcox suffers that which Bakhtin terms "degradation and debasement" (21) as at Margaret's words, "his defences fell," and "[s]he saw back to the real man in him" (144). Bakhtin refers to degradation as "regenerating" and further states that "[t]o degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place" (21). By the novel's end, Mr. Wilcox indeed undergoes a kind of new birth, but if one imagines him as symbolic of an England defined by class difference, the new England will indeed be transformed.

Mr. Wilcox as husband becomes Margaret's cause in much the same way as Mr. Bast becomes that of Helen. Margaret believes she "might yet be able to help [Henry] to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man" (185). Thus, Margaret's opinion of her husband and her attempt to teach him self-awareness invert the hierarchical structure of their marriage. She sees herself as above her husband, occupying a more lofty position than her husband, and by the novel's end she indeed "holds the reins."

While further attempting to help the Basts, who have indeed hit bottom because of Mr. Wilcox's erroneous information about Porphyrion, Helen commits her own form of transgression against the Wilcoxes. As Scales dons the mask of a gentleman in *The Old Wives' Tale*, Helen figuratively masquerades as a member of the working class as she dresses in her "oldest clothes" (Forster 220) to accompany the Basts in crashing Evie's wedding. By doing so, she destabilizes the social boundaries that separate her from Leonard: "the great and enduring emphasis of occupational costumes was on symbolic transformation, and the theatrical overthrow of

difference" (Castle 63). Her disregard for difference creates an alliance between her and Leonard that culminates in physical intimacy. Her misbehavior disrupts not only her life, but it carries destructive repercussions for Leonard, and ultimately for Charles and Henry Wilcox. Castle asserts that such reversals may have negative outcomes for the participants: "Suffice it to say here that the provocative travesties of rank and occupation intimated a potentially disarming fluidity in the realm of social circumstance" (63). Such a carnivalesque spectacle at a wedding underscores Helen's unconcern for acceptable behavior for both her own class and for that of Leonard and Jacky. Jacky's response to Helen's efforts to rescue them provides insight into the subversive nature of Helen's behavior: "She only knew that the lady had swept down like a whirlwind last night, had paid the rent, redeemed the furniture, provided them with a dinner and breakfast, and ordered them to meet her at Paddington next morning. . . . The lady had told them to, and they must," (222). Helen fails to ask the Basts what they want or need; instead, she presumes to know best for them and thereby puts them in more dire circumstances than ever. Once in the presence of Margaret, it does not take long for Leonard to realize his defeat:

> Leonard was near the abyss, and at such moments men see clearly. . . .
>
> "I shall never get work now. If rich people fail at one profession, they can try another. Not I. I had my groove, and I've got out of it. I could do one particular branch of insurance in one particular office well enough to command a salary, but that's all. Poetry's nothing, Miss Schlegel. One's thoughts abut this and that are nothing, if you'll understand me. . . . There always will be rich and poor." (223-224)

Indeed the division between rich and poor continues, but the rich are brought low by the "peculiar logic of the 'inside out,' of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom,

from front to rear," (Bakhtin 11). Henry's adulterous affair with Jacky moves to the forefront, creating difficulties in his marriage to Margaret; Leonard knows that he will never get a position from Henry, and Helen and Leonard conceive a child.

Helen's sexual relationship with Leonard creates a physical joining of two marginal groups, working class male and upper class female, but in this instance class overrides gender. The domains which Helen shares with Leonard at the performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, in the Schlegel home, and during and after Evie's wedding create an intersection of classes that disrupts "provincial habits and local tradition by the introduction of a certain cosmopolitanism, arousing desires and excitements for exotic and strange commodities" (Stallybrass & White 37). For each of the pair, the other becomes a kind of irresistible commodity that soon loses its attraction because they both misread the other's true desires.

The child born from their union represents that which Stallybrass and White call a hybridization: "the inmixing of binary opposites, particularly of high and low, such that there is a heterodox merging of elements usually perceived as incompatible," (44). For Bakhtin, grotesque realism carries a positive connotation:

> In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and it physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily

> principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. (19)

Certainly Helen's child is not grotesque, but he does represent something other as evidenced in Paul's disparaging reference to "piccaninnies" (335). The child is also heir to Margaret's fortune. Margaret advises Helen to derive joy from difference, especially the difference that her child represents: "Differences – eternal differences planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily grey" (331). The carnival-like events surrounding Evie's wedding provide a space for the joining of the high and the low, and Helen and Leonard's baby is the face of the future.

When all is said and done, the women come out on top, as Margaret gains her inheritance of Howards End: "There was something uncanny in her triumph. She, who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives" (335). Leonard falls victim to his own guilt regarding the "ruin" of Helen, and as he makes a last attempt to apologize, Charles strikes him with the side of an antique sword and "hurt him, not where it descended, but in the heart. Books fell over him in a shower" (318). While Leonard may have been briefly able to break through class boundaries in his relationship with Helen, the boundary of intellectualism remains closed to him, echoing the experience of Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley. Charles's arrogance is brought low when he receives a sentence of three years for manslaughter in the death of Leonard Bast, and Mr. Wilcox's "fortress gave way. He could bear no one but his wife, he shambled up to Margaret afterwards and asked her to do what she could with him" (327). Helen describes Margaret as "heroic" (332) because after the downfall, she "began to act, and did all" (332). Helen suffers no personal ruin from having borne a child in an

adulterous liaison. Instead, she happily intends to raise her child at Howards End, and the novel closes on a note of laughter, of "infectious joy" (336), the laughter of carnival:

> Let us say a few initial words about the complex nature of carnival laughter. It is first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. (11)

Howards End is an amalgamation of many different hierarchies: those between men and women, between the elite and the common, between the educated and the uneducated, between the naturalized and the foreign, between the urban and the rural, and between the Romantic and the Modern. The novel overturns these hierarchies in a myriad of ways, but by the end, women are indeed "holding the ropes."

Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End* hold some important common elements. Both stories show the progression of codes of behavior, class division, gender roles, technology, business practices, politics, and relationships towards modernity. In some instances characters embrace change, and in others, they cling to the past. Certainly a major indicator of change in these novels lies in the carnivalesque scenes that dismantle seemingly immovable structures of power. It is no accident that near the end of *The Old Wives' Tale*, Constance Povey, forces herself, despite "suffering severely from sciatica" (601), to overthrow her own physical boundary in favor of her "disgust with the modern world" (601) and walk to Town Hall in order to cast her vote against Federation of the Five-Towns District: "The Town Hall seemed to be miles off, at the top of a mountain. She went forward, however, steeled to do her share in the killing of Federation" (609). Voting proves to be

Constance's last and perhaps only, true act of rebellion, and by exercising her newly gained right to do so, she does her part in paving the way for women of the future.

Conclusion

When I began this project, I wanted to explore how Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory functions in Victorian novels. Ways in which people behave at fairs, carnivals, festivals, and other public events have long held an interest for me. I noticed how people became freer at these events, letting go of their inhibitions and getting caught up in the laughter and celebratory mood of the occasion. Naturally upon reading Hardy's novels, I enjoyed his depictions of hiring fairs, mummeries, skimmity rides, and club dances. Initially I limited my research to how the carnivalesque functions in Hardy's novels. Hardy's protagonists generally reside in rural areas, among rural people who hold many superstitions, enjoy ale at the tavern, work hard, laugh often, and gossip frequently. Folk humor and dialect infiltrate Hardy's works, and justice for those who do not abide by society's laws is harsh. Hardy's protagonists struggle with their community, with themselves, and with fate. Carnivalesque scenes mark opportunities for Hardy's protagonist to overthrow convention and seize the opportunity to rise to the top. They possess desires that overwhelm them, whether for a lover, an ambition, wealth, or other goals that are just beyond their reach. The protagonists, like the tragic heroes of Greek drama, suffer a downfall and evoke fear and pity in their audience. Using these tropes, Hardy reveals that the strict rules of society place a stranglehold on people's natural desires, thus preventing them from achieving the happiness that should be everybody's due.

After more reading and research, I realized that I did not want to end this project with Hardy. I decided to look at the progression of how the lower realm of society, specifically women and the working class, overturns patriarchal authority. I explored this phenomenon in novels of three different time periods: the early nineteenth century, mid-century industrial, and the turn-of-the century. I also broadened my approach to include other theorists in addition to

Bakhtin. Allon White, Peter Stallybrass, and Terry Castle represent predominant sources, but I also looked to texts by other literary critics who have either written about the carnivalesque, transgression, subversive women, Victorian feminism, labor movements, or popular forms of recreation and entertainment of the period. I focused my study on that topsy-turvy dynamic that occurs when one participates in or witnesses that which Stallybrass and White refer to as a "world-upside-down" (4). I noticed that women often aligned themselves with the working class in committing acts that worked to overturn patriarchal hierarchy. In all six novels carnival-like scenes highlight how the bourgeoisie uses the class structure and rules of female decorum in an attempt to maintain masculine power. I found that the role of women over the course of a century did indeed reveal change as female characters utilized observation, voice, influence, and their own misdeeds to destabilize power dynamics.

For example, women in the Hardy novels performed transgressive acts to assert their desire for freedom from the harsh repression society exerted upon them. Their settings are primarily rural, their misdeeds encompass both the public and private realm, and their outcomes are highly punitive. Hardy was interested in British society's prescriptive mores and wanted to show how those rules, especially those regarding marriage, restricted characters' natural desires for self-expression. In Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell's novels of the mid-century, the stories focus on women's alliance with the working class and reveal how women advocate for workers through performing their day-to-day duties of charitable works and ministering to the poor. They often come in close contact with impoverished workers when they visit their private residences or shop in the marketplace. Through this proximity, they gain insight into the working class struggle, an insight beyond the scope of male managers and business owners. They also, perhaps unconsciously, feel a kinship with that struggle. These women utilize their influence

with bourgeois males to push for better communication between the owners and the workers. Additionally, females of power like Bronte's Shirley exhibit carnival-like behavior by assertively expressing their disdain for masculine pomposity. Unlike, Hardy's females these characters avoid tragic outcomes, indicating a progression characterized by females who use vision and voice to help others. Progress occurs because women speak their minds more freely, but rules regarding feminine behavior are still in force. The difference in endings mainly exists because Bronte and Gaskell's females, while enacting some carnivalesque scenes, refrain from excessively breaching decorum's boundaries.

Bennett and Forster's novels indeed reveal that times have changed. These novels include both traditional carnivalesque displays and private acts of transgression. Female characters either already possess financial independence, or they gain it through their own ingenuity or through the natural course of events. Their relationships with men, instead of holding them back, ironically propel them forward, and they gather strength as they move. These novels certainly are characterized by fluidity and motion; characters' positions are never static. Even Constance Baines' last rebellious act involves hauling her broken body across town to cast her vote in an attempt to overturn political power. Women of this new age may suffer temporarily for their misdeeds, but they rise above the suffering and emerge renewed. A key component of Bakhtin's theory lies in the renewal and metamorphosis inherent to turning the world upside down.

Using carnivalesque theory to investigate the progression of women's roles over the course of a near-century proved to be a challenging and rewarding undertaking. Examining novels that focus on the rural, the industrial, and the modern reveals the strength, determination and perseverance of women as they confront social constructs that have worked for centuries to keep them on the bottom of power's hierarchy. The journey begins with two women who cannot

and will not fit into society's rules; then it moves to three women who have decided to use vision and voice to influence bourgeois men; then finally, two pairs of sisters gain strength from experience, achieve independence, and end their stories in a world that has changed immensely, and more changes are on the horizon for the future.

I would like to continue tracking the progress of the carnivalesque by looking at literary works throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Honestly, part of that work will involve exploring which authors to include in such research. For future research, I am interested in investigating how portrayals of the carnivalesque have changed since the early twentieth century. Is Bakhtin's theory still relevant today? If it is, how does it manifest itself? Recently I've been reading Angela Carter's 1985 book, *Nights at the Circus*. Though set in the Victorian period, it combines the carnivalesque with magical realism to construct a provocative exposition of the circus, its sideshow performers, and the psyche of clowns. Other books, television programs, and movies also focus on carnival settings and people, as exemplified by Ransom Rigg's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* and a recent season of *American Horror Story.* Andrew Robinson's article in the online periodical *Ceasefire*, "In Theory Bakhtin: Carnival Against Capital, Carnival Against Power" uses Bakhtin's theory as a touchstone to provide both a historical and contemporary view of carnival's function:

> Overall, therefore, carnivalesque remains a potential counter-power in everyday life and activism, but is 'cramped' in its potential by the repressive construction of spaces of monologue. Medieval carnival was possible because the spaces it inhabited could be carved-out and defended through the 'arts of resistance' and the power of the weak. There is a need to recompose such powers to resist, in order to recreate spaces where alternatives can proliferate.

Unless there comes a time when all people are equal, there will always remain a need for the low to rise up and call attention to the need for change. Temporary acquisitions of power through destabilizing hierarchy remain important because they draw people's attention. People continue to render a world-upside-down through participating in entertainment venues, public protests, political activism, social media, and through all other forms of artistic expression. The novel as a "chronicle" of time's passage provides a good starting place to explore these representations.

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